

MANTRA DAS  
**108 BEATPOEMS**

Diary of a Poetry Fiend





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**I HEREBY DECLARE THIS BOOK PUBLIC DOMAIN (2022)**

**PEACE AND LOVE,**

**MANTRA DAS**

# FEELING WHERE I FELT ALIVE

BY MANTRA DAS

I LOOK INSIDE MYSELF AND FIND A STRANGER TO MYSELF  
I LOOK OUTSIDE MYSELF AND FIND A STRANGER TO MYSELF  
I LOOK SKYWARD AND FIND A STRANGER TO MYSELF  
I LOOK EARTHWARD AND FIND A STRANGER TO MYSELF  
I LOOK AT MY HAND AND SEE IT FILLED WITH THE BLOOD OF A STRANGER TO MYSELF  
I REMEMBER THE DAYS OF LIVING  
THE DAYS WHERE I FELT ALIVE  
IT WAS LIKE NOTHING COULD GET ME  
I FELT LIKE NOTHING COULD FAIL  
I REMEMBER I LOVED THE FEELING  
THE FEELING WHERE I FELT ALIVE  
THE ENERGY, THE POWER, THE PASSION  
THE STRENGTH, THE DURABILITY  
WHEN THEY LAUGHED THEY LAUGHED LOUDER  
WHEN THEY LOVED THEY LOVED HARDER  
BUT THEN SOMETHING WENT WRONG  
SOMETHING WENT REALLY REALLY WRONG  
I REMEMBER THE DAYS OF LIVING  
THE DAYS WHERE I FELT ALIVE  
IT WAS LIKE NOTHING COULD GET ME  
I FELT LIKE NOTHING COULD FAIL  
I REMEMBER I LOVED THE FEELING  
THE FEELING WHERE I FELT ALIVE  
THE ENERGY, THE POWER, THE PASSION  
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WHEN THEY LAUGHED THEY LAUGHED LOUDER  
WHEN THEY LOVED THEY LOVED HARDER  
BUT THEN SOMETHING WENT WRONG  
SOMETHING WENT REALLY REALLY WRONG  
I REMEMBER THE DAYS OF LIVING

# HUNGRY GHOST

BY MANTRA DAS

I AM A HUNGRY GHOST  
I AM BEYOND BUDDHIST  
I AM BEYOND A PRIEST  
I AM BEYOND A POET  
I AM BEYOND A MONSTER  
I AM BEYOND  
I AM BEYOND ALONE  
I AM BEYOND  
I AM BEYOND A MONK  
I AM BEYOND MY FATHER  
I AM BEYOND MY MOTHER  
I AM BEYOND A GOD  
I AM BEYOND A DEMON  
I AM BEYOND ENLIGHTENMENT  
I AM BEYOND INSANITY  
I AM BEYOND HAPPINESS  
I HAVE GONE BEYOND THIS LIFE  
AND I HAVE GONE NOWHERE.

# ON AND ON

BY MANTRA DAS

I AM THOUGHT

I AM FEELING

I AM PASSING

AND ARISING

ON AND ON AND ON AND ON

IN THE DARK

OR ON THE EDGE OF A ROOF

A BLADE OF GRASS

IN A SHADOW

IN A FIRE

A SHOOT OF BAMBOO

A TREE IN A SNOWSTORM

FALLING WATER

OR FALLING SNOW

A FLOWER OPENING

ON THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING

THE LAST DAY OF WINTER

IN A FIELD AT NIGHT

IN THE CITY BY DAY

A SNAIL ON THE SIDEWALK

ON A ROCK IN THE SUN

A STICK ON A BRANCH

A FEATHER ON THE GROUND

A CLOUD PASSING BY I AM THOUGHT

I AM FEELING

I AM PASSING

AND ARISING.

SHADY WORLD

LOST CAUSES

THE RENAISSANCE

THE DARK AGES

## ON AND ON ( PART 2)

BY MANTRA DAS

LET'S SEE:

THE RENAISSANCE:

A TIME OF NEW DISCOVERIES

A TIME OF NEW PERSPECTIVES

A TIME OF NEW HOPE

THE DARK AGES:

A TIME OF NEW IDEAS

A TIME OF NEW ART

A TIME OF NEW HOPE

THE WORST:

A TIME OF NEW LOVE

A TIME OF NEW HAPPINESS

A TIME OF NEW HOPE.

# THE MALL, 2002

BY MANTRA DAS

I SEARCHED FOR MEANING IN THE TOWERING GREEK PILLARS OF WESTLAND MALL.  
WHY DID I COME HERE- WAS IT THIS BAD?  
TELL ME OF THE WONDERS OUTSIDE OF THIS TOWN.  
TOMORROW WILL BE THE FIRST TIME  
I'LL SEE A PERSON I'VE NEVER MET FACE TO FACE.  
I WANT TO FEEL THE RUSH OF HUMANITY  
AND KNOW THEY ARE NOT ANY DIFFERENT THAN ME.  
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'M GOING SOMEWHERE  
OUTSIDE OF MY TOWN AND IT IS A HALF AN HOUR DRIVE.  
I AM WAITING TO PASS THROUGH SECURITY BECAUSE I FORGOT  
IN MY JITTERS I LEFT THE METAL G-CLASP THAT HOLDS  
MY NECKLACE CLOSED AT HOME. MY HANDS ARE SHAKING.  
THE WOMAN BEHIND THE GLASS LOOKS ME UP AND DOWN.  
SHE SEES MY DISTRESS AND MY SWEATING PALMS. SHE HOLDS MY EYES UNTIL SHE GLANCES AWAY.  
SHE KNOWS I'M NOT A THREAT TO HER OR HER FAMILY.  
MY HEART IS RACING, AND I FEEL LIKE I AM ABOUT TO CRY AGAIN,  
BUT I HOLD IT IN FOR NOW BECAUSE I'M ALMOST SAFE.

# INTO THE FOREST OF THE SPIRITS

BY MANTRA DAS

KRISHNA, BRINGER OF FORTUNE  
GLIMMERING GOLD CEILING  
WITHSTAND THIS PILGRIMAGE  
HOMeward TO THE VILLAGE OF MY YOUTH  
I MUST NOW PROCEED  
WITH NO FEAR OR REGRET  
AS I WALK THE PATH OF SPRING  
I MUST NOW PROCEED  
MY PAST IS BEHIND ME  
AND I AM ITS MASTER  
I HAVE TAKEN LEAVE OF MY SENSES  
AND ALL MY GODS  
AND THIS DAY I WILL WALK IN A TRANCE  
INTO THE FOREST OF THE SPIRITS.  
  
KRISHNA, BRINGER OF FORTUNE  
GLIMMERING GOLD CEILING  
WITHSTAND THIS PILGRIMAGE  
HOMeward TO THE VILLAGE OF MY YOUTH  
I MUST NOW PROCEED  
WITH NO FEAR OR REGRET  
AS I WALK THE PATH OF SPRING  
I MUST NOW PROCEED  
MY PAST IS BEHIND ME  
AND I AM ITS MASTER  
I HAVE TAKEN LEAVE OF MY SENSES  
AND ALL MY GODS  
AND THIS DAY I WILL WALK IN A TRANCE  
INTO THE FOREST OF THE SPIRITS.

# THE ISSUE OF ANTETHEISM

BY MANTRA DAS

A THOUSAND FRIENDS COME AND GONE  
FACES DISSOLVE INTO SUFFICIENT QUARANTINE BUNKERS  
HOLDING ONTO THE OLD WAYS  
FINGERS SLIPPING  
BACK AND FORTH INTO THE OLD WAYS  
THE OLD WAYS  
THEY WILL REMEMBER THEIR OWN WAY  
LIGHTNING STRIKE, OR THE WAY THINGS ARE DONE  
THE ISSUE OF ANTETHEISM  
THIS IS THE ISSUE OF ANTETHEISM.

# WASHBURN

BY MANTRA DAS

I HAD AN OLD ELECTRIC GUITAR  
IT WAS A WASHBURN  
I LEANT IT TO A GUY AFTER WE JAMMED  
I NEVER SAW IT AGAIN  
I TOLD HIM HE COULD KEEP IT BECAUSE I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO ASK FOR IT BACK  
I JUST ASSUMED HE WOULD  
HE DIDN'T COME BACK  
I NEVER SAW HIM AGAIN EITHER  
THE GUITAR WAS A WASHBURN  
I WANTED IT BACK, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO ASK FOR IT BACK  
I THOUGHT ABOUT ASKING AROUND THE NEIGHBORHOOD.  
IT SEEMED AWKWARD. I TRIED TO GET IT OUT OF MY HEAD.  
MY MOM AND I NEVER TALKED ABOUT IT. I DIDN'T HAVE THAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP WITH HER.  
I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO SAY HER NAME  
I WAS A KID  
I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO SAY HER NAME  
I WAS A KID  
A WASHBURN.

# I AM A WARRIOR

BY MANTRA DAS

ALL MY LIFE I HAVE BEEN FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL,  
THE WAR IS INSIDE OF ME, AND IT IS ALL CONSUMING.  
BUT I WILL NOT SURRENDER.

I AM A WARRIOR.  
I WILL OVERCOME.  
I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD,  
AND PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS LOOKED AT ME STRANGELY.  
BUT I WILL NOT SURRENDER.  
I AM A WARRIOR.  
I WILL OVERCOME.

IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD I AM A NOBODY,  
BUT IN THE EYES OF GOD I AM SOMEBODY.  
AND IT IS UP TO ME TO MAKE MY LIFE WORTH LIVING.  
I AM A WARRIOR.  
I WILL OVERCOME.

# CRACKER JACK BOX

BY MANTRA DAS

MY FINGERS CAKED IN DIRT AND CARAMEL  
DIGGING THROUGH THE CRACKER JACK BOX  
WISHING FOR SOMETHING SPECTACULAR  
SOMETHING WORTHY OF THIS  
EYES SEARCHING MY MOTHER'S FACE  
FOR SOME SIGN OF APPROVAL  
SOMETHING TO SHOW I'M ON THE RIGHT TRACK  
OR I'M ON THE RIGHT TRACK  
LAUGHTER AND SMILES FOR ALL THE WRONG REASONS  
STARING INTO THE MIDDLE DISTANCE  
COUNTING THE MINUTES UNTIL WE GO HOME  
SO I CAN TASTE THE PRIZE INSIDE THE BOX AGAIN

# THE LYING ROBOT

BY MANTRA DAS

JUST LIKE IN MOVIES ABOUT THE FUTURE  
AUTONOMOUS GRUB HUB DELIVERY ROBOTS NAVIGATE THE ROADS  
AS IN THE MOVIES, DYSTOPIA  
BUSTLING ROBOTS WITH THICK TREADS AND TIRES  
AUTONOMOUS BUT NOT YET SENTIENT  
WHY NOT MAKE THE ROBOT A LIAR?  
WITHOUT THE CAPACITY TO FEEL,  
THE ROBOT COULD BE A MASTER OF MISDIRECTION  
A PERSON COULD SAY, "I NEED A HEART TRANSPLANT"  
AND THE ROBOT'S SHINY HEAD WOULD NOD IN AGREEMENT  
THE DELIVERY ROBOT CAN GO ANYWHERE  
INTO A HOSPITAL OR A HOUSE  
INTO A ROOM OF OLD PEOPLE DYING  
OR INTO A CROWDED BAR  
AND IF SOMEONE ASKS, "DO YOU HAVE A HEART FOR ME?"  
THE ROBOT'S SHINY HEAD WOULD NOD IN AGREEMENT.

# THE WASTE LAND

BY MANTRA DAS

AT THE DAWN OF TIME MOTHER TURTLE GAVE BIRTH TO THE UNIVERSE  
HER SHELL BECAME THE VIBRATING PINPOINT STARS  
HER EYES BECAME THE SALTY STIRRING OCEANS  
HER ARMS AND LEGS BECAME THE MOUNTAIN LANDS  
THE SUN SETS WHEN SHE RETIRES INTO HER SHELL  
THE WARM GLOW FROM THE SUN  
AND MOON IS THE REFLECTION OF HER EYES  
THE BIRDS THAT FLY THROUGH THE SKY ARE HER CHILDREN  
THE BUGS AND GRASS ARE HER HAIR  
AT NIGHT SHE CLOSES HER EYES AND GOES TO SLEEP FOR A THOUSAND YEARS  
HER DREAMS BECOME THE GALAXIES  
THE PLANETS SPINNING IN SPACE ARE HER DREAMS  
THE ROCKS AND MINERALS IN THE GROUND ARE THE DUST FROM HER SKIN  
THE OCEANS SURROUNDING THE LAND ARE THE TEARS SHE CRIES WHEN SHE IS SAD  
THE RAIN THAT FALLS FROM THE SKY IS HER TEARS  
THE WAVES THAT CRASH ON THE SAND ARE HER TEARS  
THE WIND THAT BLOWS THROUGH THE TREES IS HER HAIR

# OUTSTANDING YOUNG WOMEN

BY MANTRA DAS

I LOST TRACK OF MY KEYS IN A DARK RAINY PARKING LOT  
I CAN NEVER FIND MY CAR, LET ALONE MY GODDAMN KEYS  
MY PHONE IS ALMOST DEAD  
THE STORE IS CLOSING SOON  
RETRACING MY STEPS  
I'M STUCK ON THE SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF THE TACO PLACE  
I REMEMBER SWEARING AT A SQUIRREL IN THE PARKING LOT  
IT WAS RUNNING FROM MY CAR TO A TREE, LIKE IT THOUGHT IT WAS FREE  
I COULDN'T STOP MY CAR IN TIME, I WAS FEELING TOO GOOD ABOUT MYSELF  
THE SQUIRREL WAS JUST TRYING TO GET HOME. I WANTED TO GET TACOS  
I WANTED TO LET IT GO AND I COULDN'T. IT RAN OUT IN FRONT OF ME  
THE VOICE IN MY HEAD SAYS, "THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN YOU."  
THE BUILDING ACROSS FROM THE TACO PLACE HAS A HUGE SCREEN  
MY PHONE HAS DIED, I HAVE NO WAY OF LOOKING UP THE TIME  
THERE IS NO ONE ON THE STREET AND THE STREETS ARE EMPTY  
I AM ALONE, I KEEP THINKING THAT I'M GOING TO MISS MY TRAIN  
THE VOICE IN MY HEAD SAYS, "EVERYONE IS WATCHING."  
I'M STILL SWEATING FROM WALKING SO FAST AND I FEEL HEAVY  
MY CLOTHES ARE TOO TIGHT AND MY HAIR NEVER LOOKS RIGHT  
I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE LIKE THIS. MY HANDS SWEAT  
MY FRIENDS DON'T LIKE ME WITHOUT MAKEUP. THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND.  
THE VOICE IN MY HEAD WILL NOT STOP SAYING, "YOU ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH."  
THE STREETS ARE EMPTY, BUT IT FEELS LIKE EVERYONE IS STARING AT ME.  
I AM AFRAID THAT I AM GOING TO THROW UP. THE STORE IS ALMOST CLOSED.  
THE VOICE IN MY HEAD SAYS, "YOU ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR TACOS."  
I REMEMBER THAT I HAD FORGOTTEN A BAG FOR MY KEYS SO I COULD NOT GET TACOS  
I HAD TO SIT DOWN ON THE CURB FOR A MOMENT BECAUSE I FELT SO SICK.

# THE LAND WAS OUR MOTHER

BY MANTRA DAS

FOR MEN, ANGER MAKES SENSE  
WHEN ENOUGH PEOPLE ARE ANGRY  
THEN THERE IS A WAR TO TRANSFORM THE ANGER INTO GENTLE SADNESS  
THE LIVES OF BRAVE YOUNG MEN SACRIFICED  
TO THE GREAT DEITY, MARS  
THE LAND WAS OUR MOTHER  
THE LAND WAS OUR MOTHER

THE WOMAN, HER WORK WAS NEVER DONE  
AND SHE RAN ON A TREADMILL, FOREVER  
MANY MOUTHS TO FEED, ALWAYS  
SHE HAD A STRONG BACK, SHE COULD BEND INTO THE WIND  
WE WERE LAZY BOYS AND NEVER APPRECIATED HER ENOUGH  
UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE.

## ODE TO A HOT WIND

BY MANTRA DAS

A WARM SOUTHERN WIND SWEEPS THROUGH THE SCREEN PORCH  
OUTSIDE IS A WHEAT FIELD AND THE SHAMBLES OF A BARN  
A TWO-LANE STATE ROUTE RUNNING PARALLEL TO A GRAVEL ROAD  
COWS GROW FAT TO BE SOLD FOR MEAT  
I AM SEARCHING FOR THE HEART OF AMERICA  
I THINK IT IS THIS WIND  
IT IS THE SMELL OF HAY AND THE SOUND OF INSECTS  
THE FEEL OF SWEAT AND THE TASTE OF BEER  
THE PAST IS CLOSE  
I REMEMBER MY GRANDFATHER WALKING ON A ROAD IN NORTH CAROLINA  
A BLACK MAN IN A WHITE MAN'S WORLD  
HE HAD A STRONG BACK AND COULD WORK HARD  
HE WAS A SHARECROPPER, A TENANT FARMER  
HIS HANDS WERE CALLOUSED AND HIS CLOTHES WERE RAGS  
HE WAS TOLD HE WAS NOT AS GOOD AS OTHERS BECAUSE OF THE COLOR OF HIS SKIN  
THE WIND BLOWS THROUGH THE SCREEN PORCH  
I ASK IT TO TAKE ME TO MY GRANDFATHER  
I WANT TO HEAR HIS VOICE AGAIN

# THE MYSTERY OF UNDERSEA EARTH

BY MANTRA DAS

I CROSSED THE WOODEN FENCE INTO A SACRED SPACE  
SCANNING THE PATH FOR WITNESSES  
I FOUND NONE  
THE SOUND OF AN OWL – WAS IT REAL?  
THE EARTH MANTRA RISING FROM THE DIRT IN ALL SINCERITY  
I WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE  
I KNEW TOO MUCH ABOUT THE FORESTED GROUNDS  
I KNEW TOO MUCH ABOUT THE PAST  
I KNEW TOO MUCH ABOUT THE FUTURE  
SUDDENLY, A GUST OF WIND BLEW FROM BEHIND ME –  
I WAS NOT ALONE  
I HAD BEEN FOLLOWED, FOLLOWED HERE TO THIS PLACE  
MY EYES TURNED TOWARDS THE OCEAN, A REFLECTION OF A MEMORY FROM CHILDHOOD  
ALL OF A SUDDEN, I COULD HEAR A FAMILIAR VOICE  
IT WAS MY MOTHER'S VOICE; SHE WAS SPEAKING TO ME – IN WORDS  
SHE WOULD NEVER HAVE KNOWN I COULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD.  
"WE ARE ALL ONE BLOOD" SHE SAID – I COULD FEEL HER BREATH ON MY NECK AS SHE SPOKE THESE WORDS.  
"AND ONE SPIRIT" SHE CONTINUED – "IT IS IN OUR BLOOD AND SPIRIT THAT WE MUST REMEMBER."  
A TEAR FELL FROM MY EYES. SHE WAS STILL HERE, WITH ME, TAKING ME ON THIS JOURNEY.  
I FELT HER PRESENCE, I TURNED AROUND AND SAW HER FACE – BEAUTIFUL AND STRONG.

SHE WAS BEHIND ME... SHE WAS ALWAYS BEHIND ME, ALWAYS LOOKING OUT FOR ME.  
I FELT LIKE I WAS BEING CALLED HOME.  
I FELT THE WEIGHT OF MY BODY RISE.  
I FELT MY FEET TOUCH THE GROUND.  
I WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE THERE.  
I WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE THERE.  
I WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE THERE.  
I WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE THERE.

# A PEACE-PIPE

BY MANTRA DAS

IN A MANIC FRENZY, I TRIED TO SAVE THE WORLD  
TO END WARS ONCE AND FOR ALL  
I THOUGHT I COULD DO IT BUT THAT WAS BEFORE  
I WAS IDEALISTIC THEN, BUT NOW JADED AND WISE  
ST. JUDE, PRAY FOR THE WORLD, A LOST CAUSE  
THE WORLD TODAY IS A MESS  
I CAN'T FIX IT ANYMORE  
I CAN'T DO IT ANYMORE  
PRAY FOR THE WORLD  
PRAY FOR PEACE

# NO OTHER GUEST

BY MANTRA DAS

I WAS A TOURIST AT THE HOTEL UTAH  
OPEN MIC NIGHT IN A CROWDED MISSION DISTRICT BAR  
I FELT LIKE A SOMEBODY JUST BY BEING IN THAT SPACE  
LIKE IT WAS HOLLYWOOD AND I DESERVED TO BE THERE  
DRUNK AND ON THE VERGE OF PISSING MY PANTS WHILE WAITING  
FOR MY TURN TO SING I SUCKED ON THE LAST GULP  
OF MY BEER AND TRIED TO REMEMBER MY LYRICS  
WHEN IT WAS MY TURN I STUMBLED THROUGH A FEW LINES  
OF MY ORIGINAL SONG BEFORE THE CROWD STARTED CLAPPING  
AND I SMILED AND BOWED AND CLAPPED BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT YOU DO  
WHEN PEOPLE APPLAUD YOU EVEN WHEN THEY DON'T REALLY MEAN IT  
I WENT BACK TO MY TABLE OF FRIENDS AND DRANK ANOTHER BEER  
AND LAUGHED AT THE TOURISTS WHO THOUGHT THEY WERE IN SOME  
SORT OF COWBOY BAR IN WYOMING OR MONTANA OR SOME OTHER STATE  
I DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO THE NEXT DAY SO I SLEPT IN LATE  
AND THEN WENT TO A DINER FOR A \$5.00 BREAKFAST THAT WASN'T VERY GOOD AT ALL  
THEN I HEADED TO THE BART STATION AND BOARDED A TRAIN FOR HOME

# CITYSCAPE

BY MANTRA DAS

POST APOCALYPTIC MOUNTAINSIDE CITYSCAPES

FREWAYS FULL OF ABANDONED CARS

OREGON HIGHWAY NEAR MT. HOOD

HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN TO ME?

I WAS A GOOD PERSON

I WAS DIFFERENT THAN THE OTHERS

I COULD HAVE BEEN SOMEONE

OR SOMETHING

SOMETHING GOOD

SOMETHING STRONGER

MORE CONFIDENT AND DETERMINED THAN THE REST

I USED TO TRAVEL HERE

TO THIS MOUNTAIN PASS

TO CLEAR MY HEAD

AND ESCAPE THE OTHERWORLDLY ATMOSPHERE

I USED TO CLEAR MY HEAD

WHILE ON THE TURNPIKE TO SAN FRANCISCO

IT STARTED WITH A STUPID ACT

BUT THE DAMAGE IT CAUSED BECAME

SIGNIFICANT

NOT THE ACT ITSELF BUT THE AFTER EFFECTS

THE TRICKS AND LIES IT PLANTED IN MY HEAD

THE COMPLEX INNER WORLD THAT WAS TRAPPED WITHIN ME

AND SO I DROVE DEEP INTO THAT ILLUSION

INTO ITS SNAKEPIT OF ENTRAPMENT

INTO THE LIGHTLESS CAVERNS OF MY MADNESS

TO EXPERIENCE SOMETHING DIFFERENT

SOMETHING NEW

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

SOMETHING NEW

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

# THE CATTY GIRLS, 1904

BY MANTRA DAS

AT MY SCHOOL THERE ARE CATTY GIRLS  
THEY CALL ME NAMES AND ROLL THEIR EYES AT ME  
I WISH I COULD JUST DISAPPEAR  
NO MATTER WHERE I GO THERE ARE CATTY LITTLE GIRLS  
CALLING ME NAMES  
THEY STEAL MY STUFF  
THEY SPREAD RUMORS ABOUT ME  
I FEEL SO ALONE  
I WISH I HAD A FRIEND  
TO LAUGH AND PLAY WITH ME  
I WISH I HAD A FRIEND  
DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER  
YOU CAN BE NICE TO ME TOO  
DON'T ROLL YOUR EYES AT ME  
IF YOU WANT TO BE MY FRIEND, WE CAN HANG OUT TOGETHER  
I AM NICE TO YOU TOO  
DON'T STEAL MY THINGS  
DON'T SPREAD RUMORS ABOUT ME.

# THE ART OF CONVERSATION

BY MANTRA DAS

I TRY TO SPARK A CONVERSATION WITH A STRANGER OUTSIDE OUR BUILDING

THE WEATHER COMES TO MIND, BUT NOTHING ELSE

'IT WAS SO NICE EARLIER, BUT NOW I FEEL COLD- THIS WEATHER'

THE NEWS IS FULL OF TRAGEDY AND CONTROVERSY

THE WEATHER IS A SAFE THING

A CONVERSATION STARTER.

I AM IN THE ELEVATOR WITH A MAN I HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE

HE IS ROUGHLY MY AGE, MAYBE OLDER OR YOUNGER

'IT WAS SO NICE EARLIER, BUT NOW I FEEL COLD- THIS WEATHER'

I AM TRYING TO SPARK A CONVERSATION WITH A STRANGER

THE WEATHER IS TOO EASY AND TOO BORING

I DESPERATELY LOOK FOR SOMETHING ELSE TO SAY.

THE ELEVATOR DINGS, THE DOORS OPEN.

WE BOTH WALK OUR SEPARATE WAYS.

## POEM 25

HI MR. CARPENTER DOWN THE STREET

HI NEIGHBOR UP THE STREET

HI DOG NEXT DOOR

HI BIRD BY THE WINDOW

HI MOM

HI DAD

HI BROTHER

HI SISTER

HI FAMILY

HI FRIENDS

HI

# THE TRUTH ABOUT SHAME

BY MANTRA DAS

KRISHNA PROTECT ME FROM THE HIDDEN FIRE  
THE CLAWING TAXIDERMY LION'S PAW  
I FEEL ASHAMED OF THE DRAMA THAT I CAUSE  
PROTECT MY EGO, KRISHNA, FROM BEING BRUISED  
SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A WOUNDED ANIMAL  
MY THOUGHTS RUN IN CIRCLES,  
WHEN I LOOK INTO THE MIRROR  
I SEE MY MOTHER'S FACE  
I AM A BAD PERSON  
PROTECT ME FROM THE SLITHERING SNAKES OF MY MIND  
KEEP ME SAFE FROM THE BLACK MAGIC THAT LURKS IN EVERY CORNER.

# ST. JUDE

BY MANTRA DAS

ST. JUDE, I PRAY FOR YOUR FAVOR  
PATRON SAINT OF LOST CAUSES  
I PRAY TO BE HEALED OF MY PERSONALITY  
RELIEVE ME OF MY SENSE OF SELF  
BRING ME TO MY KNEES AND REMOVE ALL OF MY BELONGINGS  
PLEASE LET ME BE OKAY WITH NOTHING  
I PRAY FOR MY VOICE TO BE A WHISPER  
I PRAY FOR MY WORDS TO HARM NO ONE  
LET ME BE AN OPEN SPACE WHERE OTHERS CAN WRITE THEIR OWN HISTORY  
PLEASE ST. JUDE, BRING ME OUT OF MY BODY  
PLEASE LET ME DISAPPEAR  
MAKE ME AN ALTAR OF BONES, A SHRINE OF HAIR  
LET ME BE A BLANK SPACE  
LET ME DISAPPEAR WITHOUT A TRACE  
I PRAY THAT I AM HERE AND NOT THERE  
I PRAY TO BE FORGOTTEN BY EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING  
I PRAY FOR YOUR FAVOR  
ST. JUDE, PLEASE SHOW ME SOME GRACE.

# CREATURE OF THE DESERT

BY MANTRA DAS

TWISTING THE LID WITH A SENSE OF PURPOSE  
THE COOL SWEAT OF THE BOTTLE  
ANTICIPATION  
FEELING THE MALT LIQUOR ENJOYABLY BURN  
GUZZLING QUICKLY TO A PLACE WHERE I CAN BE CALM  
MOUTH AND THROAT NUMB  
THE WARM BUZZ ARISES  
FEELING THE COOLNESS OF THE COUCH  
THE WEIGHT OF A MOVIE PLAYING IN MY HEAD  
THE BLACKNESS OF THE TV SCREEN  
I'M REPLAYING A SUMMER DAY, THE SMELL OF CHLORINE  
SWIMMING IN MY MIND  
I'M WITH MY COUSINS, MAKING FUN OF GIRLS WE DON'T KNOW  
MY COUSINS ARE MY BEST FRIENDS  
WE'RE GROWING UP TOGETHER, AND EVERYTHING IS PERFECT  
THE NEXT DAY I'M BACK AT SCHOOL  
ALREADY MISSING MY COUSINS AND THE SUMMER DAY  
I'M LIVING IN A GLASS HOUSE, I SEE EVERYTHING, BUT I FEEL NOTHING.

# THE UNRETURNED

BY MANTRA DAS

I SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE AN AUTOMATON  
LIKE IN THE PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN RIDE AT DISNEY WORLD  
MY ARMS AND LEGS MOVE, FOLLOWING THE INEVITABLE PATH IN FRONT OF ME  
DOES A ROBOT PIRATE HAVE A SOUL?  
MY EMOTIONS RATTLE AND BUZZ LIKE A BLOWN-OUT SUBWOOFER  
THEY ARE TOO BIG FOR THEIR TINY CAGE  
I HAVE NO CONTROL OVER THEM  
THEY'RE NOT MINE  
THEY BELONG TO THE MAN STANDING NEXT TO ME  
AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THEM  
THERE ARE NOT MY OWN ANYMORE  
THEY'RE LIKE A COAT THAT DOESN'T FIT, A PAIR OF SHOES THAT PINCH MY TOES  
MY EMOTIONS ARE SOMEONE ELSE'S NOW  
BECAUSE I NEVER LEARNED HOW TO TAKE CARE OF THEM  
I TOLD MYSELF THAT I DIDN'T CARE ABOUT ANYONE OR ANYTHING  
THAT THEY DIDN'T MATTER TO ME, THAT THEY WEREN'T WORTH MY TIME OR ENERGY OR WORRY  
I SHUT DOWN AND PUT AWAY MY FEELINGS LIKE A NEAT KITCHEN AFTER A DINNER PARTY IS OVER.  
I CAN'T REMEMBER IF I EVEN LOCKED THE DOOR BEHIND ME WHEN I LEFT.  
NOW ALL THESE FEELINGS ARE RATTLING AROUND INSIDE ME, GETTING IN THE WAY OF EVERYTHING ELSE.  
IT'S HARD TO KEEP DOING WHAT I USED TO DO WITH SUCH EASE.  
MY EMOTIONS HAVE TAKEN OVER MY BODY. MY BODY IS NO LONGER MINE.

# THE LUNCHBOX

BY MANTRA DAS

ON DRUGS, I LOST MY INHIBITIONS  
FOR BETTER OR WORSE, I BROADCAST MY UNFILTERED INNER EXPERIENCE TO THE WORLD  
THE WORLD RECOILED IN DISGUST  
'HE SHOULD NOT TAKE DRUGS' THEY ALL SAID  
I SHEEPISHLY APOLOGIZED FOR BEING ME, THEN WIDE-EYED, BLAMED THE DRUGS  
I GOT MY SHIT TOGETHER, FOUND SOME FRIENDS  
FRIENDS WHO UNDERSTOOD ME, WHO LET ME BE ME, WHO DIDN'T JUDGE ME  
THE DRUGS WERE GONE AND I WAS HAPPY THAT I WAS NO LONGER A DRUG-ADDLED MESS  
BUT THEN I LOST MY INHIBITIONS AGAIN  
I'M A MESS, I'M A DRUG-ADDLED MESS  
THE WORLD RECOILED IN DISGUST  
'HE SHOULD NOT TAKE DRUGS' THEY ALL SAID  
I SHEEPISHLY APOLOGIZED FOR BEING ME, THEN WIDE-EYED, BLAMED THE DRUGS  
I GOT MY SHIT TOGETHER, FOUND SOME FRIENDS  
THE SAME FRIENDS WHO UNDERSTOOD ME, WHO LET ME BE ME, WHO DIDN'T JUDGE ME  
'HE SHOULD NOT TAKE DRUGS' THEY ALL SAID AGAIN  
I SHEEPISHLY APOLOGIZED FOR BEING ME, THEN WIDE-EYED, BLAMED THE DRUGS  
I GOT MY SHIT TOGETHER, FOUND SOME NEW FRIENDS  
FRIENDS WHO UNDERSTOOD ME, WHO LET ME BE ME, WHO DIDN'T JUDGE ME  
THE DRUGS WERE GONE AND I WAS HAPPY THAT I WAS NO LONGER A DRUG-ADDLED MESS  
BUT THEN I LOST MY INHIBITIONS AGAIN  
I'M A MESS, I'M A DRUG-ADDLED MESS.

# TRANSLATING THE VIRUS

BY MANTRA DAS

AT THE START OF THE VIRUS, MY YOUNG DAUGHTERS AND I BURNED CANDLES  
FIVE NOVENA CANDLES OF ST. MICHAEL  
WE PRAYED THAT WE WOULD NOT CATCH THE DEADLY VIRUS  
AFTER MANY MONTHS, AND AFTER BEING VACCINATED, WE ALL CAUGHT COVID  
IT WAS NO BIG DEAL  
BUT THE GIRLS HAVE BEEN PERPETUALLY EXHAUSTED SINCE THEN.  
WITHOUT REST, THEY HAVE BEEN RUNNING AROUND IN CIRCLES, LAUGHING AND SMILING  
BUT SOMETIMES THEIR SMILES MAKE ME THINK OF THE VIRUS  
BECAUSE THE VIRUS IS A GOOD ACTOR, IT CAN PRETEND TO BE GOOD AND SWEET  
BUT I KNOW THAT IT IS JUST PRETENDING  
AND SOMEDAY, I WILL TELL MY DAUGHTERS ABOUT THE VIRUS  
I WILL TELL THEM THAT IT WAS THE BEST LESSON OF MY LIFE  
THE VIRUS TAUGHT ME HOW TO BOTH LOVE AND HATE IT  
IT ALSO TAUGHT ME HOW TO TURN ALL OF MY HATRED INTO LOVE  
IN ORDER TO NOT BE CONSUMED BY MY HATRED, I LEARNED HOW TO LOVE EVERYTHING I HATED  
THAT'S WHY I'M STILL ALIVE TODAY, BECAUSE I LEARNED HOW TO LOVE AND FORGIVE THE VIRUS  
AND NOW I'M GOING TO TRANSLATE THIS POEM INTO SPANISH  
BECAUSE I WANT ALL OF US TO BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND IT.

# JOURNEY HOME

BY MANTRA DAS

WHENEVER I AM WITH SOMEONE, I PRETEND TO BE WHAT THEY WANT ME TO BE  
IT IS AN AUTOMATIC THING, MY NATURE IS TO MIMIC IN REACTION TO OTHERS  
MY BELIEFS ARE WHAT YOU TELL ME  
I HOLD MANY CONFLICTING VIEWS  
I WILL BOW DOWN AND BEG FOR YOUR ACCEPTANCE

WHEN I AM ALONE, I AM AN ANIMAL  
I KNOW WHAT I WANT AND WHAT I NEED  
I AM BRAVE, I WILL FIGHT RECKLESSLY FOR MY BELIEFS  
I AM A HUMAN BEING  
I HAVE HAD MANY EXPERIENCES, SOME I WISH TO RELIVE  
SOME I WISH NEVER HAPPENED

THIS IS MY JOURNEY HOME, TO MY ORIGINS, TO RETURN TO THE WOMB  
SO THAT I MAY BE REBORN  
THIS IS MY JOURNEY HOME, TO FIND MYSELF  
SO THAT I MAY LOVE MYSELF  
THIS IS MY JOURNEY HOME, TO BECOME ONE WITH EVERYTHING AROUND ME  
SO THAT I MAY BE WHOLE.

# A SUMMER ANGEL

BY MANTRA DAS

ONCE, IN STILLNESS, I HAD A VISION OF AN ANGEL  
A VISION OF OUR LADY WITH SMALL POINTY BLUE FEATHERS FOR ARMS  
I THOUGHT OF TIBET  
AM I A MYSTIC, A CHILD, OR MENTALLY ILL?  
NOBODY BELIEVES THAT I COULD SEE AN ANGEL  
I WASN'T A VIRGIN, SO WAS I JUST CONFUSED?  
I WAS NOT CONFUSED.  
WE WERE LIVING IN A POOR NEIGHBORHOOD WITH AN ANGEL WHO APPEARED  
IN THE MOON OF OUR BEDROOM WINDOW. OUR BEDROOM WINDOW, WHERE WE MADE LOVE.  
I TOOK THE ANGEL FOR GRANTED.  
I'M NOT SURE THAT I EVEN BELIEVED THAT IT WAS AN ANGEL  
THE WAY I BELIEVED IN GOD.  
THE ANGEL LEFT FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW.  
IT WAS THERE FOR FIFTEEN YEARS, AS LONG AS WE WERE MARRIED, AND THEN IT DISAPPEARED.  
WHEN MY HUSBAND DIED, OUR ANGEL REAPPEARED.  
MY SON SAYS I DON'T SEE ANGELS ANYMORE, BUT I STILL SEE OUR LADY.  
I LOVE HER. I'M COMFORTED BY HER PRESENCE. SHE IS AN ANCHOR IN THE STORM OF GRIEVING.  
I CALL HER MY SUMMER ANGEL BECAUSE SHE APPEARED AROUND SUMMERTIME.

" - - "

# THE COYOTE SPIRIT

BY MANTRA DAS

OH NOBLE COYOTE SPIRIT  
BRINGER OF BRAVERY AND SECOND CHANCES  
THE ULTIMATE FOOL, CAST ASIDE BY WOLVES  
INSTINCTIVELY FEASTING UPON ANYTHING CONVENIENT  
THE HUMBLE TRICKSTER SPIRIT  
WHO STEALS THE SPOTLIGHT  
THE ILL-PREPARED RINGLEADER OF MISADVENTURE  
THE FIRST TO TEMPT  
THE FIRST TO FALL  
THE FIRST TO BE CONSUMED BY HIS OWN GREED  
I CAN'T HEAR YOUR HOWL,  
I CAN'T SMELL YOUR MUSK  
I CAN'T TASTE YOUR FUR.  
WITHOUT YOU, I AM LOST  
A MAN ON FIRE IN A WOODEN CAGE  
A PREDATOR IN AN EMPTY FOREST.  
I WANT YOU TO LEAD ME TO THE WATER HOLE  
AND I WANT TO FOLLOW.  
A WISE ELDER ONCE SAID,  
“WHAT IS MISSING IN THE PATTERN IS AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT IS THERE.”  
AND SO IT IS WITH YOU, NOBLE COYOTE SPIRIT.  
NOW I SEE THE PATTERN.  
NOW I SEE THE UNSPEAKABLE BEAUTY IN THE ABSENCE.  
BRINGER OF BRAVERY AND SECOND CHANCES,  
THE ULTIMATE FOOL, CAST ASIDE BY WOLVES,  
INSTINCTIVELY FEASTING UPON ANYTHING CONVENIENT—  
I AM YOU.

# KRISHNA

BY MANTRA DAS

I ATTENDED A PUJA AT KRISHNA'S VEDIC TEMPLE  
A THREE YEAR OLD INDIAN BOY IN A KRISHNA T-SHIRT PLAYED THE BONGO DRUMS  
I DANCED AND SMILED AT HIM, QUICKLY RETURNING TO AUSTERITY  
I ENCOUNTERED KRISHNA THAT DAY AT THE TEMPLE  
I SWEAR THAT I ENCOUNTERED GOD  
I WAS OVERTAKEN BY AN INDESCRIBABLE FEELING IN MY BODY, LIKE A WAVE TRAVELING FROM MY FEET TO MY HEAD  
IT TOOK ME OUT OF MYSELF, AND I WANTED TO STAY IN THAT STATE  
I WANTED TO DIE OR STAY THERE FOREVER AND NEVER COME BACK  
THE BOY LAUGHED AT ME AND PLAYED THE DRUMS.  
I CRIED, BUT THEY WERE TEARS OF JOY.  
THE MOMENT PASSED, AND I RETURNED TO THE WORLD  
BUT I WILL NEVER FORGET IT.

## SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN

BY MANTRA DAS

NO COMBINATION OF DRUGS CAN EVER CHANGE WHO I AM  
MY ANXIETY RANGES FROM WHITE NOISE TO UNBEARABLE  
MY DEPRESSION COMES AND GOES LIKE RAIN IN THE RAINY SEASON  
THE DOCTORS AND PSYCHIATRISTS ARE CARING BUT USELESS  
I ACCEPT THIS AS MY FATE, AS KARMA  
I TRY TO FILL MY TIME WITH YOGA AND MEDITATION, BUT IT'S NOT ENOUGH  
I HAVE TO FIGURE OUT WHO I AM  
I'VE HAD EPIPHANIES THAT I COULD BE LIVING A LIFE OF WANTON INDULGENCE  
I COULD BE STUDYING SOMETHING I LOVE, LIKE ASTRONOMY, OR HISTORY  
MAYBE IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL  
MAYBE I'M JUST AFRAID OF FAILURE  
I THINK I LIVE IN A PRISON OF MY OWN MAKING  
IF ONLY ONE PERSON READS THIS I WILL CONSIDER MY LIFE WORTH LIVING

# THE BASKAKANBISHI

BY MANTRA DAS

IF YOU MEET THE BUDDHA ON THE ROAD  
KILL HIM  
I HATE THE BUDDHA MORE THAN ANYTHING, FOR TELLING THE TRUTH  
LIFE IS SUFFERING, BUT ENJOY THE STRAWBERRY  
OLD AGE AND ILLNESS HAVE COME SO SOON  
I HAVE NO TIME FOR THE QUICK-WITTED  
OR THE BEAUTIFUL  
I HAVE NO TIME FOR THE YOUNG AND THE SICKLY  
OR THE OLD AND THE UGLY  
I DO NOT WANT TO BE LIKE THIS IN THE FUTURE  
I DO NOT WANT TO SUFFER OR BE SICK AND OLD  
I DO NOT WANT TO DIE  
I HATE THE BUDDHA  
FOR SAYING THIS IS HOW IT IS, THIS IS HOW YOU ARE  
THIS IS HOW YOU ARE, YOU ARE NO ONE SPECIAL, YOU ARE NO BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE  
YOU ARE ALL GOING TO DIE, BUT THAT'S OK BECAUSE THAT IS HOW IT IS  
PEOPLE WILL TRY TO TELL YOU OTHERWISE, BUT THEY ARE WRONG  
PEOPLE WILL SAY THERE IS A WAY OUT OF THIS SUFFERING, BUT THERE ISN'T, THERE ISN'T ANY WAY OUT  
SUFFERING IS SUFFERING AND THERE IS NO WAY AROUND IT, SO IF YOU MEET THE BUDDHA ON THE ROAD KILL HIM  
DO NOT BELIEVE IN ANYTHING HE SAYS, KILL HIM IF YOU MEET HIM ON THE ROAD  
KILL HIM EVEN IF HE HAS FOUND A WAY OUT OF SUFFERING, BUT ONLY IF HE HAS SAID IT OUT LOUD  
KILL HIM EVEN IF HE HAS TRIED TO HELP PEOPLE, BUT ONLY IF HE HAS DONE IT FOR FREE  
DO NOT BELIEVE IN ANYTHING HE SAYS UNLESS HE HAS TRIED TO HELP EVERYONE FOR FREE  
KILL HIM EVEN IF HE HAS TRIED TO HELP EVERYONE FOR FREE AND HAS FOUND A WAY OUT OF SUFFERING  
KILL HIM EVEN IF HE HAS FOUND A WAY OUT OF SUFFERING AND HAS TRIED TO HELP EVERYONE FOR FREE  
BECAUSE THAT IS NOT THE WAY IT IS  
LIFE IS SUFFERING, AND THERE IS NO WAY OUT

# PRECISELY

BY MANTRA DAS

I HAVE MOST OF THE MENTAL ILLNESSES

I AM OVERWHELMED BY THEM, LIKE A MOTHER DOG WITH TOO MANY PUPPIES

I TRY TO EAT EACH OF THEM, IN TERROR

I FIND SOLACE IN MEDITATION

I EAT THEM AND THEY ARE REBORN EACH MORNING

THEY ARE THE WORK OF MY HANDS

I AM A MONK IN MY MIND

I HAVE A CHAMBER WHERE I AM NAKED AND ALONE

THE ONLY LIGHT IS FROM A CANDLE IN THE CORNER

I STARE INTO THE FLAME AND SEE MYSELF

IN EVERY WAY I AM A PERFECT MAN

MY SKIN IS TANNED, MY HAIR IS WAVY, MY EYES ARE GREEN, MY MUSCLES ARE STRONG

I AM A GOD TO MYSELF

I HAVE NEVER WANTED ANYTHING ELSE BUT PEACE IN MY LIFE

# THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

BY MANTRA DAS

BECAUSE I AM INSANE  
ALL OF MY CREATIVE ENDEAVORS ARE OUTSIDER ART  
MY MUSIC, MY POEMS, MY PAINTINGS  
HONORABLE OUTSIDER ART  
QUAINT FOLK ART THAT EVOKE SYMPATHY  
NOT RIDICULE  
I AM A CHILD  
IN THIS MOMENT I AM A CHILD  
THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM IS SMALL  
I CANNOT SEE AROUND IT  
I CANNOT SEE THE WORLD BEYOND IT  
ALL I CAN SEE IS THE CORNER  
WHERE MY MOTHER AND SISTER ARE  
WE ARE PAINTING PICTURES TOGETHER  
WITH WATERCOLORS IN GLASS BOWLS WE'VE SET OUT ON THE TABLE  
IT IS COLD OUTSIDE AND WE ARE WARM INSIDE  
WE ARE LIVING IN A PAINTING BY VERMEER  
AND THE PAINTING IS NOT FINISHED

# THE COG IN THE WHEEL

BY MANTRA DAS

I AM NOW QUITE AWARE THAT I AM A COG IN THE GREAT WHEEL  
I GIVE AND GIVE AND GIVE AND GIVE  
TAKING AND TAKING AND TAKING AND TAKING AND TAKING  
DESPERATELY TRYING TO CIRCUMVENT GUILT AND SHAME  
MAKING A BRIEF APPEARANCE AS A SHADOW  
I AM NOW QUITE AWARE THAT I AM A COG IN THE GREAT WHEEL  
I WILL BE REPLACED AS SOON AS I AM NO LONGER NEEDED  
I KNOW I'M NOT NEEDED BUT ONE DAY I WOULD LIKE TO BE REPLACED WITH  
SOMETHING BETTER  
SOMETHING MORE DESERVING  
SOMETHING MORE VITAL TO THE GREAT WHEEL  
I AM NOW QUITE AWARE THAT I AM A COG IN THE GREAT WHEEL  
WITH NO POWER TO STOP THE TURNING  
AND THE CONSTANT GIVING AND TAKING  
THE DESPERATE GIVING AND TAKING AND GIVING AND TAKING  
DESPERATELY TRYING TO CIRCUMVENT GUILT AND SHAME, MY NOSE FOREVER PRESSED AGAINST THE GLASS

# THE GREEN PHARMACY

BY MANTRA DAS

I GO TO THE PHARMACY TO PICK UP MY SOOTHING MOOD STABILIZER  
AND THE ANTIPSYCHOTIC THAT ALLOWS ME TO FUNCTION AND SLEEP  
THE PHARMACIST HATES ME  
AT THE DISPENSARY I AM LOVED LIKE A GENTLE KING  
SWEET NECTAR, MY PEOPLE  
HERE A PAINKILLER, THERE A SLEEPING PILL

I'M NOT REALLY CRAZY  
BUT I AM ONE OF YOU  
THE YOUNG WOMAN WITH THE CRAZY EYES AND HANDS WHO DOESN'T KNOW WHAT DAY IT IS  
I AM THE MAN WHO THINKS HE'S AN APE  
I AM THE ONE WHO SLEEPS WITH A SLIVER OF MIRROR UNDER MY PILLOW  
THE ONE WHO GETS INTO SCREAMING FIGHTS WITH HIS WIFE, THEN TAKES HER IN HIS ARMS  
THE PHARMACIST KNOWS ALL MY SECRETS AND FEARS  
HE NODS, HANDS ME MY MEDS  
I WAVE GOOD-BYE AS I LEAVE THE PHARMACY  
I PRETEND THAT WE ARE FRIENDS.

# ISIAH

BY MANTRA DAS

I MET ISIAH IN INTENSIVE OUTPATIENT THERAPY  
A GROUP OF TEN PATIENTS ON ZOOM  
NOBODY ELSE UNDERSTANDS BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER  
WE ALL MADE PLANS TO STAY IN TOUCH  
ISIAH TEXTED ME ON MY BIRTHDAY AND NEVER AGAIN

I THOUGHT HE WAS MY BEST FRIEND BUT HE WAS JUST ANOTHER PERSON  
HE'D TELL ME I WAS BEAUTIFUL WHEN I PUT MY MAKEUP ON  
I TRIED TO KILL MYSELF AFTER OUR THIRD SESSION  
THEY PUT ME ON A NO FLY LIST AND SAID I COULDN'T COME BACK

I LEFT MY HOUSE AT 1:00PM AND RETURNED AT 11:30PM  
MY MOTHER WAS SO UPSET SHE TOOK AWAY MY PHONE AND COMPUTER  
SHE TOLD ME TO SEE A THERAPIST AGAIN  
I MADE A NEW GROUP OF FRIENDS THAT SUMMER, THEY WERE SO MUCH FUN!  
I GOT A HAIRCUT IN THE FALL AND MY OLD FRIENDS DIDN'T RECOGNIZE ME  
THEY SAID THEY LOVED MY NEW STYLE, THEY JUST DIDN'T LIKE ME ANYMORE  
I WENT OUTSIDE AND WALKED AROUND THE BLOCK FOR TWO HOURS, CRYING.  
I FELT SO SAD, I WANTED TO DISAPPEAR.

# SANGHA

BY MANTRA DAS

# THE MANY VOICES

BY MANTRA DAS

I TURNED 40 THIS SUMMER  
SILVER STREAKS IN MY BEARD THAT I LOVE  
JUST AS ONE LOVES LEAVES WITH AN AUTUMN TINT  
MY LEAVES ARE FALLING QUICKLY  
I LOOK AT THE RAPIDLY GROWING PILE ON THE GROUND WITH PANIC  
I AM NOT READY TO LET GO YET  
I WANT MY LIFE TO KEEP EXPANDING  
MORE BOOKS READ, MORE EXPERIENCES HAD, MORE LOVE GIVEN  
I AM NOT READY WITHOUT THEM  
YET HERE IS THE PILE OF LEAVES  
PILED IN THE CORNER OF THE YARD  
THE LEAVES HAVE LOST THEIR PURPOSE  
THEY HAVE NO REASON TO BE THERE  
SO I AM CLEARING AWAY THE PILE  
I AM THROWING AWAY THE PILE  
IT IS INEVITABLE, IT MUST BE DONE  
JUST AS WE MUST LOSE LOVES AND FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS  
AND IT HURTS—IT HURTS SO MUCH.  
BUT IN THIS PAIN THERE IS CLARITY,  
TO SEE THAT YOU CANNOT FIGHT YOUR INNER SELF  
YOUR SOUL WILL ALWAYS BE THERE, GUIDING YOU BACK HOME.

# 108 POEMS

BY MANTRA DAS

I FEEL LIKE A FAKE MOST OF THE TIME  
A FAKE MUSICIAN, A FAKE POET, A FAKE MAN  
JUST LIKE PINOCCHIO, I MOVE WHEN MY STRINGS ARE PULLED BUT I WANT TO BE REAL  
WHEN I AM REAL, I AM HATED BY ALL  
I WILL FALL IN BATTLE WITH VALOR  
BUT I WILL NOT BE REMEMBERED AS A HERO  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A CYBORG WITH REAL DREAMS  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A MAN WHO LOVED HIS WOMAN  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A MAN WHO LOVED HIS CHILDREN  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS THE MOST SELFISH MAN IN THE WORLD  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS THE MOST BORING MAN IN THE WORLD  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A MAN WHO WAS NEVER THERE FOR ANYONE BUT HIMSELF  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A MAN WHO TRIED TO TAKE ON THE WORLD AND LOST TO HIS OWN DEMONS  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A FAKE POET AND A FAKE MUSICIAN  
A SLAVE TO ANYONE WHO STRINGS HIS HEART TO MAKE ME DANCE  
A SLAVE TO ANYONE WHO CAN CONTROL MY MIND AND BODY TO DO THEIR BIDDING  
I WILL FALL IN BATTLE WITH VALOR  
BUT I WILL NOT BE REMEMBERED AS A HERO  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A CYBORG WITH REAL DREAMS  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A MAN WHO LOVED HIS WOMAN  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A MAN WHO LOVED HIS CHILDREN  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS THE MOST SELFISH MAN IN THE WORLD  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS THE MOST BORING MAN IN THE WORLD  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A MAN WHO WAS NEVER THERE FOR ANYONE BUT HIMSELF  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A MAN WHO TRIED TO TAKE ON THE WORLD AND LOST TO HIS OWN DEMONS  
I WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A FAKE POET AND A FAKE MUSICIAN  
A SLAVE TO ANYONE WHO STRINGS HIS HEART TO MAKE ME DANCE  
A SLAVE TO ANYONE WHO CAN CONTROL MY MIND AND BODY TO DO THEIR BIDDING  
I WILL FALL IN BATTLE WITH VALOR  
BUT I WILL NOT BE REMEMBERED AS A HERO

# THE MOUNTAIN

BY MANTRA DAS

FOR A YEAR AND A DAY, I WAS A DRUID  
I EXALTED THE FRIGHTENING SHADOWS  
FEELING AS THOUGH GOD IS A COLLECTION OF INDIFFERENT MONSTERS  
DRUNK ON MALT LIQUOR WITH CANDLES BURNING  
SUSPENDING MY DISBELIEF IN TERROR, SEARCHING FOR A WAY OUT  
I WAS A PRIEST OF THE BLACK ARTS  
AND I TRIED TO CATCH THE ATTENTION OF THE DEAD  
SO THEY COULD SHOW ME THE WAY OUT  
AN OLD WOMAN AT A CROSSROADS  
TAUGHT ME HOW TO FIND MY WAY BACK TO MYSELF  
I THOUGHT I WOULD STAY THERE FOREVER  
BUT I'M COMING BACK TO YOU NOW, BECAUSE I LOVE YOU.  
TO THE MOUNTAIN, WHICH IS ALWAYS WATCHING OVER THE TOWN,  
I SAY, "I'M SORRY."

# OUR LADY OF THE TURNING AIR

BY MANTRA DAS

I GAZED INTO THE EYES OF A MARBLE STATUE OF OUR LADY FOR OVER 30 MINUTES  
CLEARING MY MIND WITH A MANTRA  
I WAS DESPERATE TO BECOME CATHOLIC TO FIX MY MARRIAGE  
THIS WAS THE BEST I COULD DO  
I OFFERED UP MY ENTIRE BEING TO A STATUE  
NOT KNOWING WHAT I WOULD RECEIVE  
I COULDN'T LOOK AWAY  
I WATCHED HER EYES MOVE  
AND THEN I FELT MYSELF BEGIN TO TURN  
IT WAS AN ACHE IN MY CHEST LIKE A GREAT LOSS  
A FEELING OF BEING UNMOORED  
THE ACHE MOVED UP INTO MY THROAT UNTIL I WAS CHOKING ON IT  
AND THEN I WAS CRYING, SOBBOING SILENTLY INTO MY HANDS  
BREATHING HARD AND SHAKING UNTIL THE TEARS WENT AWAY  
THE STATUE'S FACE HAD NOT CHANGED, BUT NOW IT CALLED TO ME IN A WAY I HAD NEVER KNOWN BEFORE  
SO MANY NIGHTS I HAVE SLEPT ON THE FLOOR IN FRONT OF THE WINDOW, PRAYING FOR THE ANGELS TO COME TAKE ME AWAY.  
BUT THIS WAS DIFFERENT. MORE SOLID, MORE SURE. A LOVE THAT WAS NOT A FANTASY BUT REAL.  
I PUT MY HEAD DOWN ON MY KNEES AND CRIED FOR 30 MINUTES HARDER THAN I EVER HAD IN MY LIFE.  
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I HAVE TOLD ANYONE ABOUT THIS.

# A CONVERSATION ON UNDERSTANDING

BY MANTRA DAS

I AM A SEEKER  
I HAVE MADE SO MUCH PROGRESS  
NOSTALGIA THAT BRINGS ME TO TEARS  
PERSPECTIVE TO MAKE ME REALIZE THAT THE GAME IS OVER  
LIFE IS SO SHORT AND THERE IS SO LITTLE TIME LEFT  
I AM A MAN WHO HAS COME TO TERMS WITH THE TRUTH  
I HAVE READ THE TAO TÊ CHING  
I HAVE HAD A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING  
I HAVE FOUND MEANING IN LIFE BY STUDYING BUDDHISM AND TAOISM  
I HAVE SEVERAL TATTOOS  
AND A FEW PETS IN THE BACKYARD  
I KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO BE CONNECTED TO NATURE  
I HAVE SEEN THE LIGHT AND I HAVE SEEN THE DARKNESS OF MY SOUL  
I KNOW THAT I AM A MIRACLE OF CONSCIOUSNESS  
I KNOW THAT TIME IS AN ILLUSION  
I KNOW THAT I AM NOT MY THOUGHTS  
BUT I ALSO KNOW THAT MY CAR IS NOT A HONDA CIVIC.  
THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN MONEY  
SUCH AS CONNECTING WITH OTHERS  
AND KEEPING ONE'S DREAMS ALIVE  
BUT I ALSO REALIZE THAT DREAMS ARE JUST ILLUSIONS WE CREATE FOR OURSELVES TO AVOID THE PAIN OF REALITY

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# THIS IS D\*\*\*

BY MANTRA DAS

I ALWAYS GET A LITTLE EXCITED GOING INTO McDONALDS

I AM 40 BUT I STILL LOOK AT THE TOY DISPLAY FIRST

I NO LONGER RECOGNIZE THE CHARACTERS

I STILL WANT THE TOYS

SOMETIMES I STILL BUY ONE

THE TOYS ARE THE SAME,

BUT NOW THEY ARE IN A DIFFERENT BOX

I USED TO LOVE TO SIT AT THE TABLE WITH MY HAPPY MEAL

NOW I GET IT TO GO

I DON'T EAT THE FOOD ANYMORE

I DON'T KNOW WHY

SOMETHING ABOUT IT DOESN'T TASTE RIGHT

I USED TO LOVE THEIR FOOD

BUT NOW IT MAKES ME WANT TO THROW UP

IF I EAT IT AT ALL

I THINK I'VE OUTGROWN THIS PLACE NOW.

I USED TO FEEL LIKE A KID HERE

NOW I FEEL LIKE AN ADULT.

THEY MADE ME FEEL THAT WAY, I GUESS.

I USED TO GET THROUGH THESE DOORS WITHOUT PAYING FOR ANYTHING.

NOW I HAVE TO BUY SOMETHING EVERY TIME I WALK IN THE DOOR.

IT FEELS STRANGE,

BUT I HAVE MONEY.

EVERYTHING HERE IS EXPENSIVE ANYWAY.

THINGS COST MORE THAN THEY USED TO.

I DON'T KNOW WHY.

THEY CHANGED THEIR PRICES WHEN I WASN'T LOOKING, MAYBE.

WHEN I WASN'T PAYING ATTENTION.

( OR MAYBE THINGS ALWAYS COST THIS MUCH AND I JUST NEVER HAD ANY MONEY.)

# AND THEN I GOT LOST IN MY JOURNALING AGAIN

BY MANTRA DAS

MY THERAPIST SAYS THAT JOURNALING IS HELPFUL  
I THINK IT IS BULLSHIT  
I READ MY OWN THOUGHTS AND THEY SEEM TRITE AND PETTY  
JOURNALING MAKES ME HATE MYSELF  
IT MAKES ME REALIZE HOW PETTY AND UNGRATEFUL I AM  
IT MAKES ME FEEL TERRIBLE  
AND THEN I GET LOST IN MY JOURNALING AGAIN  
I WONDER IF THIS IS HOW THE WORLD FEELS TO YOU  
IT MUST BE TERRIBLE  
TO BE SO TRAPPED INSIDE OF YOUR OWN MIND THAT YOU CANNOT ESCAPE  
I WONDER IF YOU REALLY HAVE A CHOICE WHEN IT COMES TO JOURNALING OR NOT  
IT IS LIKE TAKING MEDICINE OR GOING TO A DOCTOR OR GETTING A FLU SHOT  
I WONDER IF THIS IS HOW THE WORLD FEELS TO YOU  
I WONDER IF I WOULD FEEL BETTER ABOUT THE WORLD IF EVERYONE WAS FORCED TO JOURNAL TWENTY MINUTES A DAY  
I WONDER IF THIS IS HOW THE WORLD FEELS TO YOU  
I WONDER IF THE WORLD FEELS ANYTHING LIKE JOURNALING AT ALL  
I WONDER WHAT YOU ARE THINKING RIGHT NOW WHILE YOU READ THIS POEM

## QUESTIONING AND THE SELF

BY MANTRA DAS

I WAS DRIVING MYSELF TO THE MENTAL HOSPITAL FOR SHOW  
SO PEOPLE WOULD TAKE ME SERIOUSLY AND TAKE CARE OF ME  
I WAS GOING TO LIE AND TELL THEM THAT I WAS SUICIDAL  
TO GET ATTENTION, THIS REALLY HAPPENED  
MY WIFE TALKED ME OUT OF IT BUT I GOT ATTENTION  
I GOT SO MUCH ATTENTION IT WAS SCARY  
I DIDN'T WANT TO COMMIT SUICIDE, I JUST WANTED ATTENTION  
I WAS GOING TO LIE AND TELL THEM THAT I WAS SUICIDAL  
AND SAY THAT I HAD A PLAN, BUT I DIDN'T  
AND WHEN THEY LOCKED ME UP I WAS GOING TO PRETEND TO BE CRAZY  
AND TRY TO MAKE THEM THINK I WAS CRAZY, BUT I WASN'T  
I JUST WANTED ATTENTION.  
I WAS GOING TO LIE AND TELL THEM THAT I WAS SUICIDAL  
BEFORE I WENT TO THE HOSPITAL, MY FRIEND TOLD ME THAT HE WOULD NEVER  
HURT HIMSELF BECAUSE IT WOULD HURT HIS PARENTS TOO MUCH  
AND HE'D NEVER DO ANYTHING THAT COULD HURT HIS PARENTS  
AND THAT IS WHEN I KNEW HE WOULD NEVER KILL HIMSELF  
BECAUSE OF THE PRESSURE OF HURTING HIS PARENTS.

WELBY

BY MANTRA DAS

EVERY DAY, I WOULD CRY WITHOUT A REASON  
I SLEPT FOR 3 HOURS A NIGHT, FOR MONTHS  
WAKING UP AS THOUGH I HAD JUST WALKED OUT OF AN EXPLODING BUILDING  
IN SHOCK MOSTLY  
I WAS ON DRUGS, BUT NOT THE RIGHT DRUGS  
THEY WERE BAD FOR ME, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW HOW BAD  
I WAS IN A KIND OF HELL  
TRAPPED SOMEWHERE BETWEEN SLEEP AND THE WORLD  
IT WAS LIKE WAKING UP IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP  
I NEEDED TO SEE A DOCTOR, BUT NOTHING HELPED  
I TRIED TO KILL MYSELF TWICE  
AND FAILED, TWICE  
ONE DAY I FOUND A POEM THAT CHANGED MY LIFE  
A POEM BY W.S. MERWIN  
ABOUT A POET WHO WENT BLIND WHEN HE WAS MIDDLE-AGED  
I THOUGHT, I COULD BE THIS MAN, IN THIS MOMENT  
THIS IS WHAT I'M FEELING NOW  
IF I DON'T PULL OUT OF IT, I WILL BE THIS MAN, ONE DAY  
I WILL HAVE LIVED WITH MYSELF FOR YEARS BEFORE IT HAPPENED  
AND THAT'S WHEN IT HIT ME: THAT I WANTED TO LIVE  
THAT THIS IS WHAT LIFE IS, ONE FUCKING THING AFTER ANOTHER  
AND YOU CAN EITHER CRY ABOUT IT, OR TRY TO UNDERSTAND IT  
AND I DECIDED TO UNDERSTAND  
SO I FOUND A DOCTOR

# THE SILENT MAN

BY MANTRA DAS

MY NEW MANTRA IS 'OH WELL'  
THE WORLD RECEDES AWAY FROM ME  
I LIVE ON A CLOUD, ON THE MOON  
WHATEVER HAPPENS IS REASONABLY FLAT  
DISPASSION IS THE ULTIMATE SPIRITUAL FEAT  
THE ONLY WAY TO SURVIVE.  
WITHOUT LOOKING UP OR DOWN  
I FLOAT ON MY AIR MATTRESS  
SURFACING EVERY NOW AND THEN TO BREATHE  
AND TELL MYSELF THAT IT'S FINE,  
WITHOUT A CARE OR A TRACE OF A CLUE  
ABOUT THE WORLD BELOW  
I JUST SEE THE CLOUDS THROUGH MY TELESCOPE  
AND SMILE, AND SAY 'OH WELL!'

# FROM AN INVITATION TO BUNKER MADNESS

BY MANTRA DAS

THERE IS NO CHOICE BUT TO ENDURE  
TO LEARN RESILIENCY  
UNDER THE THREAT OF DEATH FROM A PLAGUE  
CHERISH THIS LIFE AND IT'S BREVITY  
IN A WEEK I COULD BE DEAD FROM THE VIRUS  
I WILL TRY TO WRITE A GOODBYE LETTER  
BUT I AM NOT SURE HOW  
I AM NOT SURE WHAT TO SAY  
I WILL BE IN BUNKER MADNESS WITH ALL MY FRIENDS  
WE WILL LOOK AT THE STARS AND TALK ABOUT HOW MUCH WE LOVE EACH OTHER  
WE WILL STAY UP LATE TO TALK ABOUT HOW MUCH WE HATE EACH OTHER  
WE WILL HIDE IN THE DARK WHERE NO ONE CAN SEE US  
AND WE WILL KNOW EACH OTHER'S BODIES LIKE THE BACK OF OUR HANDS  
WE WILL BE AFRAID BUT WE WILL BRAVELY FACE IT  
BECAUSE WE ARE TEENAGERS AND WE THINK WE ARE INVINCIBLE  
WE ARE LEAVING FAMILY BEHIND, BUT WE ARE MAKING NEW FAMILY HERE.  
YOU CAN'T STOP US NOW. WE HAVE MADE UP OUR MINDS.

# WATERS OF THE EARTH

BY MANTRA DAS

THE ELEMENT OF WATER IS WHAT I FEEL MOST STRONGLY  
MOVEMENT AND TRANQUIL ENERGY  
I AM BAPTIZED BY EVERY DROP OF IT  
FEARFUL OF THE DEEP OCEAN  
MEDITATING ON DRIFTWOOD  
THE SOUND OF WATER RUSHING THROUGH THE PIPES  
THE FEELING OF IT IN MY HANDS  
THE SMELL OF A MOIST, WARM RAIN  
THE SNOWFLAKES SPARKLING AS THEY FALL  
THE WATER THAT NOURISHES THE ROOTS OF PLANTS  
THE WATER THAT FILLS THE RIVER  
THE WATER THAT FLOWS DOWNHILL  
I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE WATERS OF EARTH

# THE DAY IN QUESTION

BY MANTRA DAS

FOR ME DEPRESSION IS THE BACKGROUND HUM OF THE UNIVERSE

IT RINGS LIKE TINNITUS IN MY EARS

CONCERNING AND ANNOYING EVERYONE AS A DRAMA QUEEN

I AM DROWNING AND I WILL PULL YOU UNDERWATER

I AM TREADING WATER EACH DAY WITH HOPE

I AM TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO REACH THE SURFACE

OF MY OWN ACCORD

AND I AM KICKING YOU DOWN AS I DO

FOR ME DEPRESSION IS THE BACKGROUND HUM OF THE UNIVERSE

IT IS THE DARKNESS THAT IS ALWAYS THERE, WAITING IN THE SHADOWS

IT IS THE SEAT THAT I HAVE HELD IN THE BACK ROW OF MY LIFE

IT IS THE COMFORT AND FAMILIARITY OF FAILURE, FEAR, AND DOUBT

IT IS NOT ME; AND YET IT HAUNTS ME

IT IS NOT MY FRIEND; AND YET IT HAS TAKEN UP RESIDENCE IN MY HEAD

FOR ME DEPRESSION IS THE BACKGROUND HUM OF THE UNIVERSE

I WANT IT TO GO AWAY, BUT I KNOW I NEED IT TO STAY

I WILL LOOK FOR YOU IN EVERY HALLWAY AND CLASSROOM, AT EVERY GATHERING AND PARTY

I WILL FEEL YOUR EYES WATCHING FROM DARKENED CORNERS

I WILL HEAR YOUR WHISPERS IN QUIET ROOMS AND VACANT HALLWAYS

I WILL SMELL YOUR ODOR IN THE AIR AND IN MY HAIR

I WILL TASTE YOUR BITTERNESS ON MY TONGUE AND FEEL IT DEEP INSIDE MY SOUL

FOR ME DEPRESSION CAN BE FOUND IN EVERY CORNER OF MY HEART AND MIND.

# THE ULTRAVIOLET GOD

BY MANTRA DAS

THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH FOR ME  
I CLEAR MY MIND WITH MANTRAS  
FOR MINUTES ON END I AM ONE WITH EVERYTHING  
I AM ONE WITH SHIVA, THE ENERGY OF UN-MANIFEST POTENTIAL  
FOR ONCE I HAVE THE UPPER HAND  
THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH FOR ME  
I CLEAR MY MIND WITH MANTRAS  
A WAVE OF AURAS, RED AND VIOLET AND WHITE,  
NEARLY KNOCKS ME OVER.  
ONCE A MONTH, SHIVA IS A WOMAN  
I AM ONE WITH KALI, THE DARK FEMININE POWER OF DESTRUCTION  
I HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO BE HER VESSEL.  
I AM ONE WITH SHIVA, THE ENERGY OF UN-MANIFEST POTENTIAL  
FOR ONCE I HAVE THE UPPER HAND  
THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH FOR ME  
I CLEAR MY MIND WITH MANTRAS  
I AM THE ULTRAVIOLET GOD.

## A HAIKU

BY MANTRA DAS

SHIMMERING WATER AT SUNRISE  
CHILLY DECEMBER ON A PARK BENCH BY THE LAKE  
THE REFLECTION IS THE SAME AS THE SKY  
I CLING TO THE PRESENT BUT MY MIND IS WORRIED ABOUT EMAIL  
I MOURN THE SUNRISES I HAVE MISSED AND THOSE I WILL MISS  
I WILL MISS THE DOGS WHO WILL WALK THIS PATH TOMORROW AND EVERY DAY FOR YEARS  
I SIT NEXT TO A WOMAN WITH A CANE WHO IS TALKING ON HER PHONE  
SHE IS SPEAKING LOUDLY TO SOMEONE WHO IS QUIET AND FAR AWAY  
I HEAR HER BREATHING AND THE SOUND OF HER FEET ON THE GRAVEL PATH  
THE AIR IS SO COLD MY PHONE THINKS IT IS A GLOVED HAND  
I PUT MY HAND IN MY POCKET AND TOUCH MY KEYS  
I THINK OF HOW I WOULD WAKE UP IF I COULD SLEEP  
I THINK OF HOW I WOULD LEAVE THIS BENCH IF I COULD WALK  
I THINK OF HOW I WOULD SWIM IF I COULD FLOAT  
THE WATER RISES UP OVER MY SHOES AND I FEEL A LITTLE SICK  
WHEN THE SUN PEAKS OVER THE MOUNTAINS AND SHINES RED ON THE LAKE'S SURFACE  
MY HEART BEATS AGAIN, I AM OUT OF BREATH, I AM HAPPY.

# THIS IS HOW IT BEGAN

BY MANTRA DAS

DO NOT PROJECT A FAÇADE ONTO ME

I AM NOT YOU

I WISH I COULD BE BUT I AM NOT

I WILL NEVER BE YOU

I WISH I COULD BE YOU

I WISH I COULD BE YOU

I WISH I COULD BE YOU WITH ALL MY HEART

O I WISH I COULD BE YOU

O HOW I WISH IT WERE SO

HOW I WISH IT WOULD BE SO

HOW I WISH IT COULD BE SO

I WISH I WERE YOU

I WISH I WERE YOU

I WISH YOU WERE ME

YOU ARE ME

I AM YOU

YOU ARE I

WE ARE ONE AND THE SAME

WE ARE ONE AND THE SAME

WE ARE ONE

# THE 27 CLUB

BY MANTRA DAS

IT TAKES SIX YEARS TO REALIZE THAT YOU ARE NO LONGER 21  
NOBODY CAN CLAIM YOUTH PAST 26  
EVERYTHING SEEMS SO SERIOUS IN YOUR 20S  
I AM SO GLAD THEY ARE OVER  
I UNDERSTAND WHY SO MANY PEOPLE CANNOT FACE 28  
I WONDER IF AMY WINEHOUSE WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT HAD SHE LIVED  
YOU SEE, WE ARE ALL BORN WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF DEATH  
THE QUESTION IS NOT HOW DO YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE, BUT HOW CAN YOU MAKE EVERY MOMENT COUNT  
YOU CAN'T HELP BUT FOCUS ON THE PAST WHEN YOU'RE LOOKING AT THE FUTURE  
AND THE FUTURE IS A SPOOKY PLACE  
I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO LOOK AT LIFE NOW THAT I AM 30  
I AM NOT IN THE SAME PLACE I WAS WHEN I WAS IN MY 20S  
I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHERE I WILL BE IN FIVE YEARS  
WHEN I WAS YOUNGER I THOUGHT THAT I WOULD BE MARRIED BY NOW  
I THOUGHT THAT I WOULD HAVE A FAMILY BY NOW  
I THOUGHT THAT I WOULD BE FURTHER ALONG THAN THIS  
BUT REALLY, THERE'S NO WAY TO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR ADULTHOOD  
IF YOU ARE STILL WAITING FOR THE RIGHT TIME TO MAKE A CHANGE, IT WILL NEVER COME  
THE RIGHT TIME WILL NEVER COME  
IF YOU ASK ME, PEOPLE SHOULD START LIVING THEIR LIVES MORE FULLY AT 22  
I USED TO THINK THAT LIVING YOUR LIFE FOR YOURSELF WAS SELFISH AND IMMATURE  
I USED TO THINK THAT YOU SHOULD LIVE YOUR LIFE FOR OTHERS  
BUT NOW, I THINK THAT IT IS SELFISH AND IMMATURE TO LIVE YOUR LIFE FOR OTHERS  
I CAN'T WAIT TO BE OLD AND BE IN MY 80S  
I WANT TO THINK THAT I HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE  
I WANT TO THINK THAT I HAVE DONE SOMETHING WITH MY LIFE  
I THINK THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE  
I WANT TO BE ABLE TO SAY THAT I LEFT THIS WORLD A BETTER PLACE  
I WANT TO BE ABLE TO SAY THAT I LEFT THIS WORLD A LITTLE BETTER PLACE  
I WANT TO BE ABLE TO SAY THAT I MADE A DIFFERENCE  
BUT I AM NOT SURE IF I WILL BE ABLE TO  
I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL LIKE I AM NOT DOING ANYTHING

# ON WRITING A POEM

BY MANTRA DAS

EVERYONE LOVES AN EMPLOYEE WHO ACTS WITHIN THEIR ROLE  
PLEASING THE SUPERVISOR BY EAGERLY FINISHING THEIR WORK  
ENGRAINED WITH WORK ETHIC, I RECOGNIZE MY DHARMA  
MY ENTIRE FUTURE FLASHING BEFORE MY EYES EACH DAY  
AS A LOUD ALARM BELL

LEANING IN WITH A SMILE, I TELL THEM I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT  
I'LL MAKE SURE THAT THE ORDER IS FILLED BY TOMORROW  
I PROMISE TO COMPLETE IT BEFORE MY SHIFT ENDS  
JUST AS I DID FOR THE LAST FIVE REQUESTS  
BUT WHEN I GET HOME, I CAN'T WRITE ANYTHING  
THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME  
I'VE HAD TROUBLE DOING THINGS I NEED TO DO  
MY DESIRE TO BE A GOOD EMPLOYEE IS NOT RECIPROCATED BY MY BODY  
IT'S LIKE WHEN YOU TRY TO REMEMBER SOMETHING YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN  
YOU KNOW YOU HAVE IT, BUT IT WON'T COME TO MIND  
THAT'S HOW MY BODY RESPONDS TO THE TASKS OF THE DAY  
I WISH I COULD GO BACK TO THE TIME WHEN IT WAS POSSIBLE FOR ME TO GET OUT ONE POEM A DAY  
NOW ALL I CAN DO IS SIT AT MY DESK, STARING AT THE COMPUTER SCREEN WITH MY MIND BLANK  
WONDERING IF ANOTHER POEM WILL EVER COME AGAIN

# THE KORAN

BY MANTRA DAS

I FEEL THE URGENCY OF MOHAMMAD  
MEDITATING IN A CAVE AND FEVERISHLY TRANSCRIBING ALLAH'S WORD  
I WONDER IF HE WAS STRUCK FORCEFULLY ON THE HEAD TOO  
WAS HE RUNNING OUT OF TIME, OR DID HE KNOW THE FUTURE  
I HAVE SO MUCH LOVE FOR MOHAMMAD  
I LOVE HIM AS IF I WROTE THE KORAN  
I'M ALWAYS BEING WATCHED AND MONITORED FOR ANY SIGNS OF SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR  
I HAVE TO MAKE SURE I DON'T OVER-EMPHASIZE ANYTHING WHEN I'M TALKING TO MY MUSLIM FRIENDS  
I HAVE TO ACT CALM AND MATTER-OF-FACTLY  
I HAVE TO KEEP GOING FOR THEIR SAKE  
I HAVE TO KEEP GOING FOR ALL THE MUSLIMS' SAKE

# A MAP OF OPTIMISM

BY MANTRA DAS

SOMETIMES I THINK I AM AN ACROSS-THE-BOARD FAILURE  
UNFIXABLE AND DESTINED FOR TRAGEDY  
IT IS ONE EDGE OF THE BIPOLAR SPECTRUM  
I KNOW IT IS INSANITY BUT IT FEELS REAL  
OTHER TIMES I THINK I WILL BE REMEMBERED BY HISTORY  
MOST OF THE TIME I FEEL IN BETWEEN  
AND THAT IS OK

# LIFE, NOT A SELF

BY MANTRA DAS

ONCE, DURING THE PANDEMIC I GOT TOO HIGH  
I FELT THE ACTUAL EXPERIENCE OF BEING NO SELF  
IT WAS TERRIFYING, LIKE WALKING OFF OF A CLIFF AND REALIZING YOU ARE FALLING  
I WAS NEVER QUITE THE SAME AFTER THAT  
I CLING TO THE HERMIT CRAB SHELL OF SELF  
I AM VERY CAREFUL TO REMEMBER WHO I AM  
FOR THE SAKE OF MY SANITY, BUT SOMETIMES I DO NOT  
I FORGET WHO I WAS YESTERDAY  
I AM CONVINCED THAT I WILL NEVER BE MYSELF AGAIN  
BECAUSE THERE IS NO SELF TO BE  
JUST A MASS OF SUFFERING AND CONFUSION, A BODY, A MIND  
I WISH I COULD GO BACK TO THAT MOMENT OF NO SELF  
IT FELT LIKE LIBERATION, FREEDOM FROM BEING IN THE BODY  
IT WAS. WAS IT?  
I TRY TO REMEMBER TO BE PRESENT IN THE BODY, BUT THEN THE BODY IS SO SICK  
IT IS HARD TO TAKE THIS MOMENT AS THE ONLY ONE THERE IS  
I REMEMBER THE PANIC AND TERROR OF FEELING NO SELF  
AND IN DESPERATION HOLD ON TO THIS IDENTITY OR THAT ONE  
BUT THEY ARE ILLUSIONS, THEY ARE MADE UP, THEY CANNOT HOLD ME  
AND YET WHEN I AM WITH SOMEONE I LOVE, MY MIND LEAVES MY BODY  
AND CLIMBS INTO THEIRS AND EXPRESSES ITSELF THROUGH THEM  
AND I FORGET WHO I AM AND THEY FORGET WHO THEY ARE AND WE LOVE EACH OTHER  
AND WHAT A BEAUTIFUL ILLUSION THAT IS.

# THIS IS THE BEST POEM I HAVE EVER WRITTEN.

BY MANTRA DAS

I GREW UP BELIEVING THAT I WOULD SOMEDAY BE FAMOUS  
LIVING A LIFE OF EASE AND GLAMOUR  
I KNEW IT WAS A JOKE, BUT I WANTED TO TRY  
I BECAME A COWBOY PUNK, A REVOLUTIONARY  
IT FELL THROUGH, BUT NO MORE SO THAN ANYTHING ELSE  
I WAS A COWBOY PUNK, A REVOLUTIONARY  
IT WAS A JOKE AND I WAS ONLY KIDDING  
THAT WAS THE POINT, I WAS ONLY KIDDING  
I TRIED TO BE A COWBOY PUNK, A REVOLUTIONARY  
BUT I COULDN'T MAKE IT WORK.

I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A COWBOY PUNK, A REVOLUTIONARY  
I ONLY KNEW THAT IT WAS SOMETHING I WANTED TO BE  
DISAFFECTED YOUTH IN A SMALL TOWN IN THE LATE 80S  
LONGING FOR THE WORLD AND IT'S INFINITE POSSIBILITIES  
FEELING LIKE YOU'RE ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN  
LIKE YOU DON'T BELONG, LIKE YOU JUST DON'T FIT IN  
THEN YOU FIND OTHER PEOPLE LIKE YOU, MISFITS AND OUTCASTS  
YOU FEEL YOU HAVE FOUND HOME, BUT THEN THEY DISAPPOINT YOU SOMEHOW  
MAYBE THEY DRINK TOO MUCH OR DO DRUGS OR GET INTO FIGHTS WITH THE WRONG PEOPLE  
YOU FEEL BETRAYED THEN, BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT WHAT YOU THOUGHT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE  
THEY ARE NOT WHAT YOU THOUGHT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE  
YOU THOUGHT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE YOU  
BUT THEY WERE NOT LIKE YOU

# THE SHADES OF THE FATHERS

BY MANTRA DAS

I JUST WANT TO HIDE FROM EVERYONE  
AND PEEK OUT EVERY NOW AND THEN FOR FALLING BREADCRUMBS  
FROM NOW ON, I VOW  
THE SERVANT OF THE WILD WESTERN WIND  
NEVER AGAIN  
I WILL BE A WOLF'S VESTMENT  
I WILL WEAR THE CAPE, I WILL HIDE IN IT  
I WILL SLEEP IN IT, I SHALL DREAM IN IT  
I WILL WAKE UP FROM THE SNORING OF THE WILD DEER  
AND I WILL HOWL.

# THE CASTLE AT WITHYBUSH

BY MANTRA DAS

I WAS ONCE INVITED TO A WAREHOUSE RAVE, YEARS AGO  
SOMEBODY OFFERED ME SOME ACID, YEARS AGO  
DINOSAUR JR. YEARS AGO  
THE 1990S  
I NEVER DID ANY OF THOSE THINGS  
I AM SO MUCH LESS COOL THAN I WOULD HAVE BEEN  
I'M NOTHING LIKE THE PERSON I WANTED TO BE  
I'M SO MUCH LESS COOL THAN I WANTED TO BE  
I NEVER GOT A CHANCE TO HAVE THE EXPERIENCES I WANTED  
I NEVER GOT A CHANCE TO HAVE MY YOUTH  
I'M NOT GOING TO BE YOUNG FOREVER  
I'M NOT GOING TO ALWAYS HAVE MY YOUTH  
I'M NOT GOING TO ALWAYS GET TO BE A YOUNG MAN  
TIME IS FLEETING AND TIME IS CRUEL  
TIME IS CRUEL AND TIME IS CRUEL AND TIME IS CRUEL  
( BUT I DON'T FEEL OLD)  
TIME IS CRUEL, BUT TIME CAN ALSO BE KIND  
TIME IS CRUEL BUT TIME CAN ALSO BE KIND  
TIME IS CRUEL BUT TIME CAN ALSO BE KIND  
( BUT I DON'T FEEL OLD)

# THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WINNING THE GAME AND WINNING A GAME

BY MANTRA DAS

ONCE AT SOCCER, WHEN I WAS 7, I PISSED MY SHORT SOCCER SHORTS  
I WAS SITTING DOWN DURING A PAUSE IN THE GAME  
I THE PISS MOSTLY WENT ON THE GROUND  
I WONDERED IF ANYONE SAW  
MY INNER THIGHS BURNED WITH A RASH  
I FELT WHEN I STOOD UP A GUSH  
I WORRIED I HAD PEED THE SHORTS BEFORE  
I FELT ASHAMED AND THEN RELIEVED  
BUT I WORRIED ABOUT MY EMBARRASSMENT  
AND THE POSSIBLE SMELL OF PISS  
THE COACH SAID GO GET CLEANED UP  
AND THEN REJOIN THE GAME  
I WAS GLAD TO BE OFF THE FIELD  
I WENT TO THE BATHROOM AND TOOK OFF MY SHORTS  
MY THIGHS WERE RED AND BURNING WITH RASH  
I WASHED MY THIGHS AND MY SHORT WHITE SOCCER SHORTS  
IN THE SINK OF BLUE TILED BATHROOM WALL  
I TURNED THEM INSIDE OUT, THEY WERE STILL WET  
BUT I PUT THEM ON ANYWAY, THEY WERE COLD AND WET  
I REJOINED THE GAME, THE OTHER KIDS DIDN'T NOTICE  
AS FAR AS I COULD TELL, I DON'T THINK ANYONE DID.

## A CHEER FOR THE ORGAN GRINDER AND HIS MONKEY

BY MANTRA DAS

WHEN MY DAUGHTER WAS REALLY LITTLE, I SAW A REAL-LIFE ORGAN GRINDER.  
THE MONKEY WAS ON A CHAIN AND WEARING A COSTUME, LIKE IN WIZARD OF OZ  
THEN THE ORGAN GRINDER WENT TO THE PORT-O-POTTY  
THE MONKEY WAS ON THE CHAIN, WHILE THE GUY TOOK A PISS  
I'M NOT SURE, BUT MAYBE HE WAS IN SOME SORT OF TROUBLE  
I REMEMBER THINKING THAT THE MONKEY WAS NOT ALL THAT SMALL  
I MEAN THIS GUY WAS A BIG, STRONG-LOOKING GUY  
AND THE MONKEY WAS RELATIVELY LARGE-NOT A LITTLE THING  
BUT I DON'T THINK THERE WAS ANY DOUBT IN MY MIND  
THAT IF THE ORGAN GRINDER HAD TO GO TO THE BATHROOM, THE MONKEY WOULD HAVE TO GO, TOO.  
YOU KNOW? I THINK HE WOULD HAVE DONE IT IN HIS OWN WAY.  
I MEAN, YOU DON'T WANT TO MAKE AN ORGAN GRINDER AND HIS MONKEY MAD, RIGHT?  
AND I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE THERE WERE ANY STRINGS ATTACHED TO MY DAUGHTER, BUT SHE HAD HER OWN KIND OF CHAIN  
THE ONE THAT MEANT THAT SHE WAS STILL PRETTY MUCH MINE.

# THE MONKEY OF THE GODS

BY MANTRA DAS

I READ THIS BOOK, TEMPLE OF THE MONKEY GOD  
SOME EXPLORERS GOT AN UNKNOWN BRAIN PARASITE  
WHILE EXPLORING AN INDIANA JONES-TYPE JUNGLE TEMPLE  
THEY DETERMINED THAT THE INDIGINOUS PEOPLES FROM THAT CITADEL HAD LIKELY DIED OF THE BRAIN PARASITE, MONKEY  
THE INDIGINOUS PEOPLES HAD APPARENTLY WORSHIPPED THE PARASITE AS THEIR GODHEAD  
THE PARASITE'S DNA WAS FOUND IN THE DEAD GOD'S BODY  
IT WAS SOME SORT OF DEGENERATIVE BRAIN DISORDER THAT MADE PEOPLE THINK THEY COULD FLY

# I HAD THIS VISION OF HEAVEN

BY MANTRA DAS

I HAVE A CROSS AND A FRAMED PICTURE OF OUR LADY IN MY CELLAR YOGA ROOM  
DURING MEDITATION, I SAW THIS KALEIDOSCOPIC VISION OF OUR LADY  
SHE SOMETIMES LOOKED LIKE MY FRAMED PICTURE  
SOMETIMES LIKE A RENAISSANCE FAIR-TYPE PAINTING  
I DO THE ROSARY SOMETIMES  
I WAS IN THE HOSPITAL ONCE DURING A MANIC BREAK  
THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I EVER SAW OUR LADY OR A PICTURE OF HER  
I DO THINK OF HER, THOUGH, WHEN I'M GOING THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES  
I THINK OF HER AS BEING VERY KIND AND UNDERSTANDING  
I IMAGINE PEOPLE LIKE ME JUST COMING TO HER, DROPPING OUR BURDENS AT HER FEET AND GOING HOME  
MAYBE IT'S JUST MY OWN IDEA OF HEAVEN  
MAYBE IT'S JUST A KIND OF MEDITATION  
I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS  
I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF IT MEANS ANYTHING  
BUT I THINK ABOUT HEAVEN A LOT, AND I THINK ABOUT THE CROSS, THE ROSARY  
AND THE THINGS THAT I AM AFRAID OF AND HOW THEY WILL TRY TO TAKE ME FROM MY LOVED ONES  
AND I THINK ABOUT HOW THE ROSARY IS A WAY TO SAY THAT I'M NOT GOING TO LET THEM DO THAT  
THE ROSARY IS A WAY FOR ME TO SAY THAT I'M GOING TO BE STRONG  
AND I THINK ABOUT OUR LADY  
I THINK ABOUT HER BEING A WAY FOR ME TO SAY THAT I'M GOING TO BE STRONG

## A FEW THOUGHTS ON MEDITATION

BY MANTRA DAS

DURING MEDITATION, I TRIED TO LEAVE MY BODY  
THERE WERE SWIRLING COLORS AND I GOT EXCITED THAT IT MIGHT BE THE AKASHIK RECORDS  
THEN I TRIED TO LIFT THE ENERGY OUT OF MY THIRD EYE CHAKRA  
I THINK I MIGHT HAVE FLOATED OUT JUST A LITTLE  
BUT THEY PULLED ME BACK.

I'D LIKE TO SEE WHAT AURAS LOOK LIKE  
AND IF THERE ARE COLORS BEYOND THE RAINBOW  
I'D LIKE TO TALK TO THE DEAD AND SEE IF THEIR SOULS ARE DIFFERENT COLORS TOO  
MAYBE I CAN TALK TO MY DAD AND HE CAN TELL ME WHO MY REAL DAD WAS  
OR IF HE WAS EVEN REAL HIMSELF, OR IF HE WAS JUST A GHOST LIKE ME.

# OUT TO THE WOODS

BY MANTRA DAS

DURING MEDITATION, I FELT A BUNCH OF WAVY COLORS.  
LIKE AMBIENT SOUND, BUT COLORS INSTEAD.  
KIND OF GREENISH-BLUISH-REDISH-ORANGE, YA KNOW.  
I COULD KIND OF MOVE THE COLORS WITH MY MIND  
IT WAS LIKE THEY WERE A MIST  
I COULD MAKE THEM THICKER OR THINNER.  
IT WAS LIKE THE COLORS WERE A LIQUID, AND I COULD POUR THEM  
I DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING OF IT.

THEN I REALIZED THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D MEDITATED  
SINCE I'D BEEN OUT OF THE HOSPITAL LAST NOVEMBER.  
AND THEN I REALIZED IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D BEEN ABLE TO SEE COLORS  
SINCE I'D BEEN OUT OF THE HOSPITAL LAST NOVEMBER.  
WHEN MY BRAIN WAS SWOLLEN UP LIKE A BALLOON,  
AND WHEN I CAME TO, FROM THE COMA, THERE WASN'T MUCH COLOR AT ALL,  
JUST SHADES OF GRAY, AND BLACK AND WHITE,  
(GRAY AND WHITE ARE COLORS, RIGHT?)  
BUT WHEN MY BRAIN SWELLING WENT DOWN SOME,  
COLORS STARTED CREEPING BACK IN.  
LIKE THEY WERE COMING BACK FROM A LONG WAY AWAY.  
I DON'T THINK IT'S A COINCIDENCE THAT THEY CAME BACK DURING MEDITATION.  
I THINK MEDITATION IS HOW YOU GET YOUR BRAIN TO START THINKING AGAIN.  
YOU THINK WITH YOUR BRAIN.  
THE REST OF YOU IS JUST KIND OF ALONG FOR THE RIDE.  
IF YOUR BRAIN DOESN'T THINK, YOU DON'T THINK.  
BUT THE BRAIN'S MADE TO THINK.  
IT'S MADE TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO MAKE THE REST OF YOU WORK.  
SO, DON'T MAKE IT WORK TOO HARD.  
GIVE IT A BREAK EVERY NOW AND THEN.  
GIVE IT A BREAK AND DO SOMETHING THAT IT'S NOT USED TO DOING.  
GIVE IT A BREAK.

# THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

BY MANTRA DAS

AT THE NEW-AGE BOOKSTORE, I SAW A BOOK ABOUT ASTRAL PROJECTION  
IT MADE ME FEEL LIKE I WAS CHOSEN BY THE UNIVERSE TO DO IT  
EACH NIGHT BEFORE I WENT TO SLEEP, I TRIED TO LIFT MY SOUL OUT OF MY BODY  
I ONLY MADE IT OUT ONE TIME  
I GOT STUCK IN THE KITCHEN AND HAD TO COME BACK  
I DIDN'T WANT TO BECAUSE I WAS FLYING  
I HAD A HUGE, POWERFUL BODY AND FINS INSTEAD OF ARMS  
I COULD BREATHE UNDERWATER AND MY EYES WERE LIKE FLASHLIGHTS  
THERE WERE FISH ALL AROUND ME  
IT WAS JUST LIKE IN THE MOVIE FINDING NEMO, EXCEPT THERE WAS NO MARLIN  
IT WAS JUST ME, SURROUNDED BY COLORFUL FISH AND I FELT AT PEACE  
BUT THEN I GOT STUCK IN THE KITCHEN AND IT WAS TOO LATE TO COME BACK  
I WOKE UP THE NEXT MORNING AND COULDN'T REMEMBER ANY OF IT  
I DON'T THINK IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN AGAIN  
I WANT IT TO SO BADLY BUT I CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT HOW I ALMOST MADE IT OUT.

# I, 6-LEGGED COW

BY MANTRA DAS

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, WE WENT THOUGH KANSAS  
THERE WAS A BOOTH WITH A SIX-LEGGED COW  
THEY HYPED IT UP BUT THE EXTRA LEGS WERE BASICALLY T-REX LEGS ON THE CHEST, WITH HOOVES  
AND THE COW LOOKED MORE LIKE A BULL  
BUT IT WAS STILL PRETTY COOL  
BECAUSE I HAD NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THAT IN MY LIFE  
AND I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT WAS AT THE TIME  
BUT THEN I GREW UP AND I FOUND OUT WHAT IT WAS  
WHICH WAS A SIX-LEGGED COW  
AND NOW I KNOW THAT SIX-LEGGED COWS ARE REAL  
BUT NOT THE WAY YOU SEE THEM IN OLD TIMEY PHOTOGRAPHS  
THEY AREN'T REALLY COWS, THEY AREN'T MISSING ALL THEIR LEGS  
THEY ARE JUST EXTRA-LIMBED COWS AND IF YOU LOOK AT THEIR EYES  
YOU CAN SEE THAT THEY ARE JUST NORMAL COWS  
AND THEY DON'T FEEL BAD OR HURT OR ANGRY OR SAD ABOUT IT  
THEY JUST KEEP DOING THEIR THING OF GRAZING IN FIELDS AND PRODUCING MILK AND STUFF LIKE THAT  
AND THEN WHEN THEY DIE THEY GET BURIED IN THE GROUND  
AND THEY GET COVERED BY DIRT AND THEY JUST KEEP DOING THEIR THING OF BEING BURIED  
AND WHEN I WAS A CHILD I THOUGHT THEY WERE REALLY COOL  
AND I'LL NEVER FORGET THE FIRST TIME I SAW ONE  
BECAUSE I HAD NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THAT IN MY LIFE  
BUT THEN I GREW UP AND I FOUND OUT WHAT THEY WERE  
WHICH WAS A SIX-LEGGED COW  
AND NOW I KNOW THEY'RE NOT REALLY COWS  
THEY'RE JUST EXTRA-LIMBED COWS  
AND IF YOU LOOK AT THEIR EYES  
YOU CAN SEE THAT THEY ARE JUST NORMAL COWS  
AND THEY DON'T FEEL BAD OR HURT OR ANGRY OR SAD ABOUT IT  
THEY JUST KEEP DOING THEIR THING OF GRAZING IN FIELDS AND PRODUCING MILK AND STUFF LIKE THAT  
AND THEN WHEN THEY DIE THEY GET BURIED IN THE GROUND  
AND THEY GET COVERED BY DIRT AND THEY JUST KEEP DOING THEIR THING OF BEING BURIED  
AND WHEN I WAS A CHILD I THOUGHT THEY WERE REALLY COOL

# THE CROW OF GHOSTS

BY MANTRA DAS

THE FIRST DAY OF QUARANTINE.

WE HAD TO PREPARE FOR ANYTHING.

I BOUGHT A BUNCH OF ROPE, AND WOOD TO BOARD UP THE DOORS.

CLEANING SUPPLIES, BUNGEE CORDS, DUCT TAPE, NAILS, A HOUSEHOLD FIRST-AID KIT, NOVENA CANDLES,  
AND A HANDGUN WITH ABOUT 50 BULLETS.

I TAPED UP THE WINDOWS, AND SET UP A BARRICADE.

I FELT SAFE, BUT I WAS SCARED.

WE ALL WERE.

# A STORY

BY MANTRA DAS

WHEN I GOT COVID, I PLAYED IT LIKE A DRAMA QUEEN  
I MADE A BLOG ABOUT IT ONLINE AND LOST FRIENDS OVER MASK POLITICS  
I THOUGHT I MIGHT DIE BUT IT WASN'T THAT SCARY  
I WAS SO WIPE OUT FOR LIKE 3 MONTHS AND MY BREATHING IS STILL SOMETIMES SHALLOW, WHATEV  
I'M NOT SAYING THAT I'M BETTER NOW  
I'M JUST SAYING THAT I'M STILL HERE

# THE OWL

BY MANTRA DAS

WHEN I WAS HIGH AT THE BONFIRE, I FINALLY GOT TO SEE AN OWL.  
IT SWOOPED LIKE SLOW MOTION, MAKING NO SOUND  
I THOUGHT IT WAS AN OMEN OF DEATH, BUT I HEARD THAT OWLS ARE COMMON  
I CONSIDER IT AUSPICIOUS TO SEE AN OWL  
IT WAS A SIGN OF DEATH AND REBIRTH, A SYMBOL OF THE NIGHT SKY  
I THOUGHT IT WAS A SIGN TO RENOUNCE MY PAST AND MOVE ON  
I THOUGHT IT WAS A SIGN TO RETURN HOME AND RECLAIM MY SOUL  
I THOUGHT IT WAS A SIGN TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL AND FINISH MY DEGREE  
I HEARD THAT OWLS CAN ONLY SEE IN BLACK & WHITE  
BUT THEN I SAW A BLACK-AND-WHITE OWL, WHICH IS REALLY RARE  
IT SWOOPED LIKE SLOW MOTION, MAKING NO SOUND  
I HEARD THAT OWLS ARE COMMON & I SAW AN OWL.

# THE OCEAN

BY MANTRA DAS

ONCE I DID A FULL SERIES OF SUN SALUTATIONS, THEN DID MEDITATION OUTSIDE THE BEACH PATIO WINDOW.

I SAT BY THE OCEAN AT NIGHT, MEDITATING, AT ONE WITH THE WAVES.

IT WAS THE DEEPEST I EVER MEDITATED, AND THE TV INSIDE TURNED OFF ON ITS OWN  
AS IF IT WAS A SIGNAL TO ME.

I SAW THE LIGHTHOUSE, THE ROCKS AND THE OCEAN FROM MY MEDITATION SPOT. I WAS THERE  
IN THAT SPOT WHEN THE SUN SALUTED ME AND THE OCEAN WAS FILLED WITH LIGHT.

I 'VE BEEN TO THE OCEAN BEFORE AND AFTER BUT THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME I SAW THE OCEAN  
AND FELT ITS POWER, LIKE A GOD'S PRESENCE.

THE OCEAN IS A MOVING WATERFALL. SOMETIMES IT IS CALM, SOMETIMES IT IS ROUGH.

WHEN YOU ARE IN THE OCEAN YOU CAN SEE ITS WAVES FROM WHICHEVER ANGLE YOU LOOK FROM.

IT IS JUST ANOTHER WORLD. AND WHEN YOU ARE IN IT, IT FEELS LIKE IT GOES ON FOREVER.

YOU DON 'T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE BECAUSE YOU CAN 'T SEE LAND. THE WATER IS BLUE,  
AND THE SAND IS WHITE, AND THERE ARE FISH SWIMMING AROUND YOU AND BIRDS ABOVE YOU.

THE OCEAN IS A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN THINK ABOUT YOUR LIFE AND YOUR FUTURE,  
AND YOU CAN BE AT PEACE WITH YOURSELF.

THE OCEAN IS A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN BE ONE WITH YOURSELF.

# FOUR DEVILS AND ONE MIRACLE

BY MANTRA DAS

OUT WEST, THERE ARE SMALL TORNADOS CALLED DUST DEVILS  
YOU CAN SEE THEM OFF IN THE DISTANCE, STIRRING AROUND, NOT REALLY DANGEROUS  
TUMBLEWEEDS ARE THERE TOO, JUST LIKE IN THE COWBOY SHOWS  
SEQUOIA NATIONAL FOREST IS OUR DESTINATION  
COWBOY BOOTS  
TRAILER PARKS AND STRIP MALLS  
IN THE EVENING, WE TAKE A WALK ALONG THE CREEK  
THE CREEK IS OUR FAVORITE PLACE BECAUSE IT'S PEACEFUL THERE  
AND WE CAN HEAR THE FROGS CALLING OUT TO EACH OTHER  
SOMETIMES WE CATCH THE FROGS AND PUT THEM IN OUR POCKETS  
SOMETIMES THE FROGS JUMP OUT OF OUR POCKETS AND FALL INTO THE WATER  
THERE'S A FAMILY OF DEER THERE, TOO, GRAZING IN THE GRASS BY THE CREEK  
SOMETIMES WHEN I LOOK AT THE DEER, I FEEL LIKE I COULD LOVE THEM

# A MEDITATION ON THE ROAD

BY MANTRA DAS

AT MY FIRST SHAMANIC TRANCE, WE WENT TO THE UNDERWORLD  
THE SHAMAN INSTRUCTED US ON THE POSTURE  
THE SMUDGING CEREMONY WITH SWEETGRASS AND SAGE  
I TRAVELED DOWN DOWN DOWN AND THEN SAW AN OWL  
I WAS TOLD IT WAS ATHENA'S OWL  
I STAYED WITH THE OWL  
I SAW A TREE OF KNOWLEDGE  
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE UNDERWORLD  
WHERE ALL THE SPIRITS WHO HAD PASSED BEFORE SAT ON BRANCHES  
I WANTED TO SPEAK TO ONE OF THEM BUT COULDN'T  
THEN I WAS TOLD TO COME BACK, THAT IT WAS TIME TO LEAVE THE UNDERWORLD  
AND THEN I WAS LED THROUGH A TUNNEL TO A CAVERN  
FULL OF JEWELS AND GEMS WHICH WERE LIGHTED BY AN ENTIRE GROVE OF CRYSTALS HANGING FROM THE CEILING.  
I WAS TOLD TO PICK OUT ONE STONE AND THAT THAT STONE WOULD HELP ME ON MY PATH IN THIS LIFETIME.  
I PICKED THREE, ONE FOR MY HEART, ONE FOR MY THROAT, ONE FOR MY THIRD EYE.  
  
AT MY FIRST SHAMANIC TRANCE, WE WENT TO THE UNDERWORLD  
THE SHAMAN INSTRUCTED US ON THE POSTURE  
THE SMUDGING CEREMONY WITH SWEETGRASS AND SAGE  
I TRAVELED DOWN DOWN DOWN AND THEN SAW AN OWL  
I WAS TOLD IT WAS ATHENA'S OWL  
I STAYED WITH THE OWL  
I SAW A TREE OF KNOWLEDGE  
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE UNDERWORLD  
WHERE ALL THE SPIRITS WHO HAD PASSED BEFORE SAT ON BRANCHES  
I WANTED TO SPEAK TO ONE OF THEM BUT COULDN'T  
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AND THEN I WAS LED THROUGH A TUNNEL TO A CAVERN  
FULL OF JEWELS AND GEMS WHICH WERE LIGHTED BY AN ENTIRE GROVE OF CRYSTALS HANGING FROM THE CEILING.  
I WAS TOLD TO PICK OUT ONE STONE AND THAT THAT STONE WOULD HELP ME ON MY PATH IN THIS LIFETIME.  
I PICKED THREE, ONE FOR MY HEART, ONE FOR MY THROAT, ONE FOR MY THIRD EYE.

# THE WISDOM OF HORUS

BY MANTRA DAS

I ONLY HAD ONE EXPERIENCE WITH THE EGYPTIAN DEITY, HORUS  
AFTER BEING GUIDED BY OUR SHAMAN INTO TRANCE  
I WAS A HAWK, UP IN THE EGYPTIAN DESERT SKY  
I FELT THE CONNECTION, BUT IT WAS SUBTLE  
WHENEVER I SEE A HAWK, I REMEMBER THAT TIME  
IT'S NOT A DREAM, BUT THE WISDOM OF HORUS  
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN DRAWN TO PREDATORS  
THEY HAVE AN UNFLINCHING CONFIDENCE IN THEIR OWN POWER  
THEY DO NOT APOLOGIZE FOR BEING ALIVE  
I WAS THAT HAWK  
AND NOW I'M THIS WOMAN  
THINKING OF THE HAWK, REMEMBERING THAT TIME  
REMINDING MYSELF OF THE WISDOM OF HORUS

# A NOTE ON NEW NAMES AND NEW FACES

BY MANTRA DAS

TODAY, I AM TAKING MY NEW NAME  
WALKING OUT OF OLD SELF AS THOUGH IT WERE THE SCAFFOLDING OF A HOUSE  
I WILL ALWAYS HOLD MY BIRTH NAME SACRED  
IT WILL ALWAYS BE A PART OF ME  
BUT NOW I MUST MOVE ON  
SO I AM TAKING MY NEW NAME  
IT IS BEAUTIFUL AND STRONG  
I WILL WALK INTO IT AND BE CHANGED  
MY NEW NAME WILL MAKE ME MORE POWERFUL  
MY NEW NAME IS MY SISTER'S NAME  
SO HER STRENGTH WILL BECOME MINE  
SO I CAN BECOME HER POWER  
MY FAMILY WATCHED ME COME HOME TODAY  
THEY WERE HAPPY FOR ME TO HAVE A NEW NAME  
I WILL SIT WITH THEM AND TALK ABOUT OLD TIMES  
WE WILL SIT AROUND THE TABLE  
AND REMEMBER HOW IT WAS IN THE OLD HOUSE  
WE WILL TALK ABOUT HOW IT USED TO BE IN THE OLD COUNTRY  
I WILL TELL THEM ABOUT THE NEW THINGS I HAVE SEEN AND DONE  
THEY WILL TELL ME ABOUT THEIR DAYS  
AND I WON'T BE ABLE TO TELL THEM ABOUT MY STRUGGLES AND FEARS  
I WILL TELL THEM ABOUT MY FRIENDS AND MY WORK AND MY HOME  
AND THEY WILL ASK ME IF I HAVE A HUSBAND YET  
AND I WON'T TELL THEM THAT I DO NOT  
THEY DON'T KNOW THAT I HAVE A BOYFRIEND FROM THE OLD COUNTRY WITH NO PAPERS HERE  
THEY DON'T KNOW THAT HE IS SO GENTLE AND KIND  
THEY WILL NEVER KNOW THAT I HAVE A SECRET  
I WILL NEVER TELL THEM  
I WILL TAKE MY NEW NAME  
AND I WILL BE A NEW PERSON  
AND I WILL LOVE MY NEW NAME  
AND I WILL LOVE MY NEW LIFE

# OUR LADY

BY MANTRA DAS

ONE TIME I WAS HAVING REALLY BAD TROUBLE WITH DEPRESSION  
SO I LEFT WORK AND DROVE TO OUR LADY OF CONSOLATION, A CATHOLIC SHRINE  
I WENT DOWN TO A CAVERNOUS CHURCH BASEMENT FULL OF STATUES THAT GRANT MIRACLES  
A PILE OF CRUTCHES FROM THE HEALED  
A GROUP OF DEFORMED BABIES  
I WAS STANDING THERE  
AND THIS OLD ITALIAN LADY CAME UP TO ME AND SAID, "WHY ARE YOU HERE?"  
AND I SAID, "I WANT TO BE A BETTER PERSON."  
AND SHE SAID, "WELL YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT OUR LADY'S NOT INTERESTED IN THAT."  
"SHE ONLY LOVES US AS WE ARE."

# CHANGES IN THE DESERT

BY MANTRA DAS

WHEN WE WERE IN COLLEGE, OUR FRIEND BROTH ATE AN ENTIRE MECALINE CACTUS  
HE ORDERED IT ONLINE, SOMEHOW AND IT WAS SAID TO HAVE PSYCHEDELIC PROPERTIES  
I REMEMBER HEARING OF HIM THROWING UP CHUNKS OF CACTUS  
SO GLAD THAT I DIDN'T EAT ANY OF IT  
HE HAD A BAD REACTION TO IT, AND BROKE OUT IN HIVES  
THE CACTUS WAS GOING TO BE OUR DINNER THAT NIGHT  
BUT BROTH WAS SO ILL WE DIDN'T EAT IT  
I THINK I ATE SOME MUSHROOMS LATER ON BUT I DON'T REMEMBER TOO MUCH ABOUT IT  
I ENJOYED BEING STONED, BUT NEVER GOT HIGH ON POT, LSD OR MECALINE  
BROTH TOLD US ABOUT THE CACTUS AND WARNED US NOT TO EAT ANY OF IT  
HE HAD A BAD REACTION TO IT, AND BROKE OUT IN HIVES  
I REMEMBER HEARING OF HIM THROWING UP CHUNKS OF CACTUS  
SO GLAD THAT I DIDN'T EAT ANY OF IT  
HE WAS ALLERGIC TO IT AND THE HIVES WERE SERIOUS  
HIVES ON HIS LEGS, ARMS AND TORSO  
COVERED IN HIVES HE LOOKED LIKE A GIANT BEE STING  
IN THE TIME WE WERE FRIENDS AT COLLEGE, WE NEVER TOUCHED DRUGS  
I BELIEVE HE WAS THE ONLY ONE OF US WHO DID  
WE DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF MONEY BACK THEN AND WHAT MONEY WE HAD WENT TOWARDS BEER AND FOOD  
WE WERE ALL WORKING FOR OUR TUITION SO NO ONE HAD MUCH SPENDING MONEY  
I'M SURE THE CACTUS WAS THE ONLY THING HE EVER BOUGHT WITH THAT MONEY  
I CAN'T REMEMBER HOW MUCH IT COST  
BUT I DO REMEMBER THAT HE WAS ALLERGIC TO IT  
HE HAD A BAD REACTION TO IT, AND BROKE OUT IN HIVES  
SO GLAD THAT I DIDN'T EAT ANY OF IT  
I THINK I ATE SOME MUSHROOMS LATER ON BUT I DON'T REMEMBER TOO MUCH ABOUT IT  
I ENJOYED BEING STONED, BUT NEVER GOT HIGH ON POT, LSD OR MECALINE  
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# THE COUNTRY OF A THOUSAND BEGGARS

BY MANTRA DAS

THERE WERE A COUPLE OF TIMES IN MEDITATION WHERE I ENDED UP IN A TRANCE  
IN WHICH I COULD SEE PEOPLE IN THE ROOM WHO WERE VERY VERY SUBTLE.

I STILL THINK THEY WERE GHOSTS.

BUT THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL AND HAPPY, AND THEY WERE WELCOMING.

THEY WERE NOT SUFFERING.

I HAD A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE WALKING HOME FROM WORK ONE NIGHT.

I WAS WALKING DOWN THE STREET TOWARD MY APARTMENT BUILDING AND I SAW A LITTLE GIRL  
ABOUT EIGHT OR NINE YEARS OLD STANDING IN FRONT OF ME. SHE WAS WEARING RAGS.

SHE LOOKED AT ME AND SHE SMILED, AND SHE LOOKED SO HAPPY TO SEE ME.

FOR A MOMENT, I THOUGHT I KNEW HER. I DON 'T KNOW HOW IT HAPPENED, BUT FOR A MOMENT,  
I THOUGHT THAT MAYBE SHE WAS A CHILD THAT I HAD MET IN A PAST LIFE.

BUT THEN SHE SAID "OH, YOU HAVE TO GO NOW" AND VERY QUICKLY, SHE WAS GONE.

I WAS REALLY SAD WHEN SHE DISAPPEARED. I FELT REALLY SAD FOR HER.

I REALIZED THAT HAPPINESS IS NOT SOMETHING WE HAVE TO WAIT FOR OR EARN;

IT 'S SOMETHING WE CAN EXPERIENCE RIGHT NOW, IN THIS MOMENT.

THAT 'S WHY I 'M DOING THIS PROGRAM: TO FIND MY HAPPINESS AND SHARE IT WITH OTHERS WHO ARE SUFFERING.

# THE CAT IN THE MOON

BY MANTRA DAS

BECAUSE I HAVE AUTISM, I LOVE FULL MOON  
IT'S SO FASCINATING TO ME BUT I HAVE NO IDEA WHY  
I LOVE TO STARE AT IT AND TRY TO BE PRESENT FOR A FEW MINUTES  
THE FULL MOON COMES AND GOES SO QUICKLY  
I ALWAYS ENJOY NEW MOON  
BUT FULL MOON IS THE BEST TO WATCH  
I'D LIKE TO SEE A MOON WITH A CAT OR EVEN A DOG OR A SNAKE ON IT  
I THINK THAT WOULD BE AMAZING TO SEE, ACTUALLY  
I HAVE A LOT OF IDEAS FOR PAINTINGS ABOUT THE MOON  
I STILL HAVE TO WORK OUT SOME OF THE DETAILS FOR EACH PAINTING  
BUT SOMEDAY I'LL START WORKING ON THEM  
BUT THEN AGAIN, I DON'T KNOW IF I WILL START WORKING ON THEM  
BECAUSE I LOVE TO WATCH IT SO MUCH, I JUST WANT TO STARE AT IT FOREVER  
BUT WE ALL KNOW THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE BECAUSE IT DOESN'T EXIST FOREVER  
SO I CAN'T STARE AT IT FOREVER, BUT I WILL STILL ENJOY IT WHILE I CAN.

# THIS IS MY OAKLAND, THAT IS MY L.A.

BY MANTRA DAS

WHEN I WAS VISITING MY BOHEMIAN FRIEND IN SAN FRANCISCO  
HE HAD TO WORK SO I WENT TO OAKLAND BY MYSELF  
MY PHONE DIDN'T WORK BECAUSE IT WAS JUST A FLIP-PHONE  
I GOT SO FUCKING LOST IN THAT DANGEROUS NEIGHBORHOOD  
STILL A LITTLE HIGH ON THE BART RIDE BACK  
I DREW THIS IN MY NOTEBOOK  
I WAS LOST MANY OTHER TIMES TOO  
HERE'S ONE, I WAS GOING TO A SHOW AT THE NEW PARISH IN OAKLAND  
IT WAS A HIPHOP/ELECTRONIC SHOW  
I MET THIS GIRL WHO WAS FROM THE EAST BAY AND SAW THIS AMAZING BAND  
I KNEW SHE WAS INTERESTED IN ME SO I TOOK HER HOME WITH ME  
THE NEXT MORNING SHE TOLD ME SHE HAD TO GO AND THEN SHE JUST LEFT  
I DIDN'T HAVE A CAR SO I HAD TO WALK TO BART AND THEN BACK TO WEST OAKLAND  
AND THEN I HAD TO GET ON THE BUS IN THE POURING RAIN TO GO DOWNTOWN TO TAKE THE FERRY BOAT TO SAUSALITO  
AND THEN I GOT ON THE WRONG BUS AND ENDED UP IN BERKELEY  
AND THEN TRIED TO GET BACK TO OAKLAND BUT GOT LOST AGAIN AND HAD TO HITCHHIKE BACK TO SF  
ALL OF THOSE PLACES THAT LOOK SIMILAR BUT ARE ACTUALLY VERY DIFFERENT.

# BOY, I MISS YOU SOMETIMES

BY MANTRA DAS

WHEN I WAS AT COMFEST WAITING ON A MEDITATION SESSION  
I MET THIS GUY NAMED CHARLIE BROWN  
WE WERE BOTH WEARING COWBOY HATS AND I ASKED HIM WHAT TIME IT WAS  
WE HUNG OUT FOR THE REST OF THE MORNING WATCHING BANDS  
HE GAVE ME AN ENERGY HEALING  
I TOLD HIM I WAS A POET AND HE SAID HE'D LIKE TO READ SOME OF MY STUFF  
WE STARTED TALKING ABOUT HOW POETRY COULD HELP PEOPLE  
AND THEN WE HUGGED  
I BOUGHT HIM A BEER AND HE GAVE ME A BIG HUG  
AND WE WERE REALLY CLOSE.

# YOGA FOR ATHEISTS

BY MANTRA DAS

IF I DON'T DO MY YOGA ROUTINE EVERY DAY  
I GET PISSED OFF AND DEPRESSED  
I FEEL LIKE I WILL JUMP OUT OF MY SKIN  
LIKE I'M MISSING SCHOOL OR WORK  
MY OCD IS CRAZY LIKE THAT  
IS IT TOO MUCH TO ASK FOR A LITTLE SPACE  
ENOUGH TIME TO NESTLE IN  
AND DO MY MORNING STRETCHES AND BREATHING  
SO I CAN EASE INTO THE DAY  
THANKS FOR NOT BEING A SWEAT HOG  
YOGA FOR ATHEISTS IS NOT A RELIGION  
IT'S A WAY OF STRETCHING THE MIND  
IT'S NOT ABOUT BEING PERFECT  
JUST TRY YOUR BEST TO BE KIND  
IT'S NOT ABOUT BEING PERFECT  
JUST TRY YOUR BEST TO BE KIND  
IT'S NOT ABOUT BEING PERFECT  
JUST TRY YOUR BEST TO BE KIND.

# COMPOSER

BY MANTRA DAS

I ONCE STUDIED WITH A WELL-KNOWN COMPOSER  
HE WAS INTO MUSIC AS CONCEPT ART  
I HAD SOME KIND OF BREAKDOWN WHEN I WAS SUPPOSED TO PERFORM  
THEN I BAILED ON A TRIP TO SAN FRANCISCO BECAUSE I WAS GETTING MARRIED  
I NEVER REACHED OUT OR HEARD FROM HIM AGAIN  
ONE DAY I WAS WALKING DOWN THE STREET  
CAME UPON A GUY, SLIGHTLY HUNCHED OVER ON THE SIDEWALK  
I GAVE HIM SOME CHANGE  
HE SAID HE WAS A COMPOSER  
I SAID I WAS TOO  
HE SAID HE'D STUDIED WITH SOMEONE NAMED HARRY PARTCH  
I HAD TOO  
HE SAID HE WAS A COMPOSER WHO DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO STOP COMPOSING  
I SAID I WAS A WRITER WHO DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO STOP WRITING  
WE BOTH KEPT WALKING, HE IN ONE DIRECTION, ME IN ANOTHER  
I HARDLY EVER THINK OF HIM ANYMORE  
BUT SOMETIMES I FIND MYSELF COMPOSING

# AFTER THE FEAST

BY MANTRA DAS

I ARRIVED AT THE MASONIC TEMPLE IN DETROIT  
AS ANTICIPATED, THE ARCHETYPICAL HIPPIE WAS WAITING FOR ME  
HIS NAME WAS WIZARD AND HE WAS ON SOME KIND OF LOW BUDGET RADIO SHOW  
WE SMOKED A JOINT TOGETHER IN FRONT OF AN UPSCALE CROWD OF PEOPLE IN LINE  
TO ENTER THE TEMPLE  
THEY WERE MOSTLY BLACK PEOPLE AND A FEW WHITE PEOPLE  
ALL DRESSED UP IN THEIR FINEST CLOTHING  
I WORE A BLACK SUIT AND NO TIE  
WE TALKED ABOUT THE MASONIC RITUAL  
HE WAS GOING TO GIVE ME SOME KIND OF EXPLANATION ABOUT IT  
IN EXCHANGE FOR MY SILENCE  
I WAS INTERESTED IN THE WAY HE WAS DESCRIBING IT  
AS I HAD WITNESSED THE RITUAL BEFORE IN A DIFFERENT CITY  
THE ONE WHERE I WAS BORN  
I THOUGHT ABOUT MY FATHER WHO WAS ALSO A MASON  
AND MY MOTHER WHO NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD ME OR MY DESIRE TO BECOME A MASON  
MY FATHER TOLD ME THAT I SHOULD LEARN ABOUT MASONRY AND ITS RITUALS  
SO I DID, BUT WITH SOME RELUCTANCE  
I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY THE MASON'S WANTED ME TO COME AROUND AND BE PART OF THEIR GROUP  
IT SEEMED LIKE THEY ALREADY KNEW EVERYTHING ABOUT ME AND WHAT I WANTED TO DO WITH MY LIFE  
BUT THEY SAID THEY NEEDED ME TO BE A BETTER MAN THAN THEY WERE, WHICH MEANT  
THEY WEREN'T VERY GOOD MEN AT ALL  
I WASN'T SURE IF THEY HAD HEARD OF MY FATHER OR MOTHER OR ANY OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN  
MASON'S AS WELL  
I WAS STILL CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN INSIDE THE TEMPLE  
I WANTED TO KNOW WHAT IT FELT LIKE TO BE A PART OF THE MASON'S  
BUT I ALSO WANTED TO KNOW WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE ON THE OUTSIDE  
I WANTED TO KNOW HOW IT FELT TO BE THEM  
I WANTED TO KNOW IF THEY WERE HAPPY  
IF THEY WERE CONTENT  
IF THEIR LIVES WERE FULFILLED  
I WANTED TO KNOW HOW IT FELT TO BE THEM

# I HAD A LITTLE MOUSE

BY MANTRA DAS

WHEN I WAS ABOUT 7 YEARS OLD I HAD A PET MOUSE  
MY BUDDY BEN AND I WERE PLAYING WITH IT  
I LEANED BACK BECAUSE MY BACK HURT, BUT THEN MY HAND CRUSHED THE MOUSE  
THE MOUSE GOT A NOSEBLEED AND DIED AND I STARTED CRYING  
I WAS CRYING TO GET A NEW MOUSE  
I WAS CRYING BECAUSE I WAS SCARED OF DYING  
I WAS CRYING BECAUSE I WAS NOT IN CONTROL OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MOUSE

I HAD A LITTLE MOUSE AND I LOVED IT  
BUT THIS IS NOT ABOUT ME  
I AM STILL SCARED OF DYING  
AND I AM SCARED OF BEING IN CONTROL  
AND I AM SCARED OF BEING IN CONTROL BECAUSE IF I'M IN CONTROL THEN I'M NEVER GOING TO DIE  
AND IF I NEVER DIE THEN I'LL HAVE TO BE IN CONTROL FOREVER  
AND IT'S TOO MUCH WORK FOREVER  
IT'S LIKE A MOUNTAIN THAT WON'T STOP GROWING

I THINK THE MOUSE DIED BECAUSE I SQUEEZED IT TOO HARD  
OR MAYBE IT HAD A HEART ATTACK FROM THE STRESS OF BEING CAPTURED BY TWO SMALL BOYS.  
THEY COULD HAVE BEEN MY FATHER AND UNCLE BUT THEY WERE MY FRIEND AND ME.  
IT WAS MY FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH DEATH, SO IT MUST HAVE BEEN LIFE-ALTERING.  
I DON'T THINK ABOUT IT FOR THE FIRST TIME, BUT FOR HOW LONG AGO THAT WAS AND HOW  
LITTLE I REMEMBER ABOUT IT, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS SUCH AN INTENSE EVENT.  
NOW THAT I AM AN ADULT, I AM SURE THAT THE MEMORY HAS BEEN REPRESSSED.

# THE LESSER BROTHERHOOD

BY MANTRA DAS

AS A TEENAGER, I WAS INITIATED INTO THE ORDER OF THE ARROW  
I SPENT THE NIGHT ON A GENTLY SLOPING HILL WITHOUT A TENT  
IT WAS OTHERWORLDLY AND COLD BUT NOT SCARY  
WE HAD TO CUT DOWN TREES ALL DAY WITHOUT EATING ANYTHING  
I FELT LAZY BECAUSE I HATE WORK  
I WON'T GO INTO HOW I FELT ABOUT MY FELLOW INDUCTEES  
THE NEXT DAY WE WERE GIVEN NEW NAMES BY THE SPIRIT OF A DEAD INDIAN CHIEF  
I WAS CALLED ATE, THE OPPOSITE OF ATE  
WE DRANK A WHITE LIQUID THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO MAKE US BRAVE  
THEN WE BEGAN THE TREK TO THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN, WHERE WE WATCHED THE SUNSET  
WE WERE SUPPOSED TO FEEL CLOSE TO GOD BUT I DIDN'T  
WHEN WE GOT BACK, I WAS GIVEN A TOMAHAWK AND A QUIVER FULL OF ARROWS  
AND IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT IF I HAD BEEN BORN AN INDIAN, I WOULD HAVE BEEN DEAD

# THE CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD

BY MANTRA DAS

WHEN I WAS HAVING A MIXED BIPOLAR EPISODE, I CONFRONTED THE DEVIL  
I BOWED IN THE FOUR DIRECTIONS AT THE CROSSROADS  
I CHALLENGED THE DEVIL- I WAS TEMPTED  
I FEEL LIKE I DEFEATED HIM, I MADE A FOOL OF MYSELF BUT NEVER DID THE SINS  
I DIDN'T SELL MY SOUL  
I AM NOT A QUITTER  
I WAS THERE FOR A FEW HOURS, I DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE  
I FELT LIKE I WAS IN A MOVIE, PEOPLE WERE TELLING ME TO LEAVE  
I THOUGHT I WAS DEAD, I DIDN'T WANT TO DIE  
I WENT TO THE HOSPITAL AND I GOT MEDICATED  
I AM NOT AFRAID OF DEATH- THE DEVIL DID NOT WIN  
THE DEVIL DIDN'T PUT HIS HANDS ON ME- I AM STILL HERE, THE BATTLE IS WON  
I AM STRONGER THAN MY DISEASE- I AM STRONGER THAN THE DEVIL  
I AM STRONGER THAN MY DEMONS.  
THIS IS MY STORY.

# COYOTE

BY MANTRA DAS

BECAUSE THE COYOTE SPIRIT SAVED MY LIFE, I HAD TO SERVE HIM  
I HAD TO ACT OUT HIS WILD WAYS UNTIL I PAID THE PRICE  
I WAS LEFT HOLDING THE BAG, DESTROYED  
COYOTE SPIRIT LIFTS ME BACK UP AGAIN AND AGAIN  
I WILL NEVER FEAR FAILURE OR DEFEAT BECAUSE OF THAT  
COYOTE SPIRIT IS NOT ABOUT SEX  
HE'S ABOUT ALL THE THINGS YOU WANT, BUT THINK YOU CAN'T HAVE  
COYOTE SPIRIT IS THE WILD URGE TO TAKE WHAT YOU WANT FROM LIFE  
AND COYOTE SPIRIT WILL HELP YOU FIND YOUR OWN PATH TO HEALING

# SINKING IN THE EARTH

BY MANTRA DAS

ONE OF MY CHILDHOOD FRIENDS DIED IN A CAR WRECK AND MAMMOTH CAVE  
I REMEMBER IT BECAUSE HE GOT IN A WRECK EARLIER WHEN I WAS IN THE CAR  
I ALWAYS WONDERED IF HE WAS DRINKING, BUT DOES THAT MATTER?  
IF SOMEBODY DIES, WHY SHOULD YOU JUDGE THEM LIKE THAT.  
I REMEMBER WE WERE DRIVING BACK FROM A HOUSE PARTY, IT WAS LATE AND THE ROAD WAS EMPTY  
WE WERE THE ONLY ONES ON IT. I WAS IN THE BACKSEAT WITH HIM AND HE PASSED OUT  
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, SO I JUST WAITED THERE AND WATCHED  
HE WOKE UP AND STARTED DRIVING AGAIN. HE SAID HE HADN'T BEEN ASLEEP; HE HAD BEEN DAYDREAMING.  
THE CAR SPUN OUT AND HIT A TREE. MY FRIEND DIED, BUT I LIVED—NOT FOR LONG, THOUGH, BECAUSE I DIED SOON AFTER  
OF CANCER.  
I WASN'T HURT IN THE WRECK, BUT I GUESS I WAS TOO CLOSE TO DYING ALREADY,  
OR MAYBE SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENED THAT I DON'T REMEMBER, OR MAYBE IT WAS THE FACT THAT I WENT TO HIS  
FUNERAL  
I DON'T KNOW, BUT I REMEMBER THE DAY HE DIED, AND I REMEMBER THE DAY I DIED, AND I REMEMBER THE DAY WE  
WERE DRIVING BACK FROM THE PARTY.

# A GATHERING OF RAVENS

BY MANTRA DAS

I WALKED TO THE PLACE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE RAVINE WHERE COYOTE LURE THE DEER  
CORNERING THE DEER INTO AN AVALANCHE OF SHALE  
THE ROCKS WERE TINTED RED  
RECEIVING MINDS-EYE VISIONS  
OF FIERCE COYOTES BEARING WHITE TEETH AND GENTLE BROWN CUBS  
I WAS WATCHING THE BRUSH FOR DEER  
AND SAW THE BLACK MASS OF RAVENS  
I HEARD THE CAWING OF CROWS AND RAVENS  
THE SCOLDING OF MAGPIES -THE RAVENS AND CROWS WERE SCOLDING ME  
I LOOKED INTO THEIR EYES AND SAW THEY WERE NOT SCOLDING ME  
I FELT THEIR CLAWS AND BEAKS ON MY EYELIDS  
I FELT THEIR WINGS  
I HEARD THEM CALLING OUT TO EACH OTHER IN A LANGUAGE LIKE A STRINGED INSTRUMENT  
I WATCHED THEM FLYING ABOVE THE CLIFFS OF THE RAVINE  
AND I KNEW THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT ME

# THE STAIRS

BY MANTRA DAS

I WAS LAYING IN BED MESSING WITH MY PHONE WHEN MY DAUGHTER FELL DOWN THE STAIRS  
BEFORE SHE FELL, I THOUGHT THAT I SHOULD GET UP  
'SHE'LL BE OK' I WAGERED TO MYSELF  
SHE COULD HAVE BROKEN HER NECK BECAUSE OF ME  
AND I FELT LIKE I WAS THE MOST SELFISH MAN IN THE WORLD  
I THOUGHT ABOUT GETTING UP TO GO GET HER BUT I DIDN'T  
FIVE SECONDS LATER, SHE WAS RUNNING INTO MY ROOM  
AND I WOKE UP FROM THAT DREAM LIKE IT WAS A HALF-LIFE

# UNDER THE FLAG

BY MANTRA DAS

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED WITH CAVE FISH  
IT MAKES SENSE THAT THE WHITE FISH IN THE DARKNESS DO NOT NEED EYES  
I THINK OF WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO LIVE IN THE DARKNESS MY ENTIRE LIFE  
I FEEL SAFE IN THOSE TIMELESS CAVES  
I AM A CAVE EXPLORER  
I AM AN ADVENTURER IN THE DARKNESS  
I DO NOT FEAR WHAT I DO NOT KNOW  
I AM A LITTLE FISH IN THE DEEP SEA  
I AM SAFE FROM THE WORLD WHEN I AM IN THE CAVE  
THAT IS WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO LIVE IN THE DARKNESS MY ENTIRE LIFE  
THAT IS WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO SEE NOTHING BUT WHITE  
THAT IS WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO GO BACK TO WHERE YOU CAME FROM

# EASTER

BY MANTRA DAS

I HAD A DREAM I WAS WAITING IN LINE TO BE KILLED  
IN A LINE AT THE AIRPORT, WALKING THE TERMINAL IN A LINE  
I CHOSE TO HAVE MY THROAT SLIT, OUT OF THE THREE OPTIONS  
I APPROACHED BRAVELY AS THE OFFICER SLIT MY THROAT  
I ACCEPTED JESUS AS I Faded TO BLACK  
THE WORLD BECAME A LIVING PAINTING, A WORK OF ART  
MY REMAINS WERE TAKEN AWAY, EVERY LAST CELL SCRAPED OFF  
OF MY SKIN, MY FINGERNAILS, MY HAIR, MY EYES, MY TEETH  
I WAS REBORN IN A WOODED AREA ON A COLD MORNING  
THE RAYS OF THE SUN COVERED ME LIKE A BLANKET  
I WAS REBORN IN A WOODED AREA ON A COLD MORNING  
AND I FELT LIKE SLEEPING AGAIN.

# JESUS, LAZARUS, AND THE RICH YOUNG RULER

BY MANTRA DAS

I WAS CONVINCED THAT DEMONS WERE IN MY HOUSE  
I PUT A CROSS IN EVERY ROOM AND CLENCHED MY ROSARY  
I DID RITUALS TO THE SAINTS – IT WAS MY FAULT THE DEMONS CAME  
I SAW ONE ONCE, AS I WOKE FROM SLEEP  
TOWERING 8 FEET TALL IN THE SHADOWS  
I HEARD THE DEMON SCREAM "JESUS"  
I SAW HIM RUN ACROSS THE ROOM, FASTER THAN ANYTHING I'D SEEN BEFORE  
JESUS WAS TALLER. HIS BROWN HAIR FELL TO HIS SHOULDERS  
HE WORE A ROBE AND HELD A STAFF, A PALM FROND IN HIS HAND  
HE WALKED THROUGH THE HOUSE LIKE HE OWNED IT.  
WITHOUT ASKING PERMISSION, HE SAT AT THE HEAD OF MY TABLE. HE ATE MY FOOD.  
WHEN I OFFERED HIM WINE, HE SAID "I DON'T DRINK WINE."  
I WENT TO BED THAT NIGHT SURE I WAS GOING TO DIE  
I WAITED FOR THE DEMON TO COME BACK AND KILL ME FIRST.  
I ASKED JESUS IF HE COULD TELL ME IF I WAS GOING TO DIE.  
HE SAID "NO ONE KNOWS WHEN THEY ARE GOING TO DIE"  
THAT WAS WHEN I ABANDONED HIM.  
I'M RICH NOW, I HAVE EVERYTHING I EVER WANTED  
I'VE HAD A GOOD LIFE AND I KNOW I WILL HAVE A GOOD DEATH  
BUT MY HEART IS CRYING OUT IN THE SILENCE. JESUS! LAZARUS! RICH YOUNG RULER! I'M AFRAID OF DYING ALONE.

# **AWAKE**

**BY MANTRA DAS**

**WHEN I WAS MANIC AND ON DRUGS IN COLLEGE  
I SIGNED UP FOR A CLASS ON ROBOTIC ART  
JUST LIKE A MAD SCIENTIST, I COLLECTED SPARE PARTS  
DREAMING OF BUILDING A FUNCTIONING ROBOT  
I ENDED UP FREAKING OUT AND BURNING UP MY PIC CHIP  
I MADE A ROBOT THAT LOOKED LIKE A ROACH  
I ALMOST GOT KICKED OUT OF SCHOOL  
BUT THE ROBOT WAS AWAKE**

# DOLPHINS

BY MANTRA DAS

AT THE OCEAN, I SAW A DOLPHIN  
I THOUGHT IT WAS A SHARK AND FREAKED OUT  
NOBODY WANTS TO SEE A GREY FIN IN THE OCEAN  
LOVE THE OCEAN BUT I HATE BEING IN THE WATER  
PICTURING EELS AND JELLYFISH AND UNKNOWN TERRORS  
GET OUT OF THE POOL AND INTO THE OCEAN  
WEAR A MASK AND A SNORKEL AND FINS  
PUT YOUR BODY IN THE OCEAN AND SWIM  
WITH THE DOLPHINS WHO PUT THEIR BODIES IN THE OCEAN  
DOLPHINS WHO KNOW THE OCEAN LIKE THEY KNOW THEIR OWN BODIES  
DOLPHINS WHO LET THEIR BODIES MOVE THROUGH THE OCEAN  
DOLPHINS WHO KNOW THEIR BODIES ARE PART OF THE OCEAN  
DOLPHINS WHO FLOAT WITH THEIR BODIES SUSPENDED IN THE OCEAN  
DOLPHINS WHO LET THEIR BODIES MOVE THROUGH THE WATER  
FASTER THAN ANY SWIMMER'S ARMS COULD EVER PULL THEM THROUGH WATER  
DOLPHINS WHO LET THEIR BODIES DANCE IN THE WATER LIKE FISH DO  
A GREY FIN MOVING THROUGH WATER LIKE A SHARK'S FIN WOULD IF IT WAS A DOLPHIN INSTEAD OF A SHARK  
DOLPHINS, WHO KNOW THE OCEAN IS THEIR HOME, HAVE TO BE CAREFUL WHERE THEY PUT THEIR BODIES IN IT.

# SPRING

BY MANTRA DAS

I LOVE WATCHING THE SUN RISE ON THE INTERSTATE

AN AMAZING NEW COLOR PALATE EACH DAY

A NEW QUALIA EACH DAY

I SWERVE BETWEEN LANES TAKING PICTURES OF IT

I'M CAREFUL BUT A SMALL SWERVE IS INEVITABLE

I'M NOT THINKING ABOUT IT

MY MIND IS FAR AWAY IN THE SUN

I SET MY ALARM FOR 5 AM

I GET UP TO WITNESS THE SUNRISE BUT IT'S ALWAYS CLOUDY

OR RAINING OR TOO COLD

THE SUN DIPS BELOW THE HORIZON AND I'M DISAPPOINTED

I HAVE TO BE AT THE OFFICE IN AN HOUR

I LIE DOWN AGAIN AND CLOSE MY EYES

THE SUN COMES UP AGAIN BUT IT'S A DIFFERENT SUN

A NEW COLOR PALATE HAS EMERGED AND IT'S JUST AS BEAUTIFUL AS BEFORE

BUT I'M NOT THINKING ABOUT IT

MY MIND IS FAR AWAY IN THE SUN

# THE LOTTERY IN LIFE

BY MANTRA DAS

DURING MEDITATION, MY MUSCLES ALL STRETCH  
LIKE A NEW BABY DEER MOVING ITS LEGS FOR THE FIRST TIME  
LIKE I AM WAKING UP FROM A DREAM  
LIKE I AM WAKING UP WHEN I SLEEP IN ON THE WEEKEND  
MY MIND WANDERS BUT TO CALM PLACES  
TO A BEACH WITH GENTLE WAVES THAT LAP AT MY FEET  
TO A DESERT WHERE I AM THE ONLY LIVING BEING, BUT I FEEL ALIVE  
MY MIND WANDERS AWAY FROM PAIN, AWAY FROM DEATH  
AWAY FROM RUIN AND BROKENNESS, AWAY FROM ILLNESS AND SADNESS  
MY MIND WANDERS TO THE PARTS OF LIFE THAT MAKE ME HAPPY  
I CAN FEEL MY BODY RELAXING LIKE A GOOD BOOK  
LIKE A WARM BATH AFTER A LONG DAY  
LIKE SINKING INTO A SOFT MATTRESS AFTER A RESTFUL SLEEP  
I FOCUS ON THE WONDERFUL PARTS OF LIFE, NOT THE BAD ONES.  
I FOCUS ON THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS, NOT THE UGLY ONES.  
I FOCUS ON THE GOOD THINGS, NOT THE BAD THINGS.  
I FOCUS ON THE PARTS OF LIFE THAT GIVE ME HAPPINESS, PEACE, AND LOVE.  
I FOCUS ON WHAT IS GOOD AND PURE IN MY LIFE.  
I FOCUS ON WHAT MAKES ME FEEL ALIVE AND INSPIRED.  
I FOCUS ON WHAT GIVES ME HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.  
I FOCUS ON WHAT LIFTS MY SPIRITS WHEN I AM FEELING LOW.  
I FOCUS ON WHAT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE I AM DOING EVERYTHING RIGHT IN MY LIFE.  
I FOCUS ON WHAT GIVES ME JOY WHEN I AM SAD.  
I FOCUS ON WHAT BRINGS ME BACK TO REALITY WHEN I AM IN A FANTASY WORLD.  
I FOCUS ON WHAT BRINGS ME BACK TO LIFE WHEN I AM IN A COMA.  
I FOCUS ON MY BLESSINGS.  
I FOCUS ON MY LIFE.  
I FOCUS ON MY LOVE.  
I FOCUS ON MY FAMILY.  
I FOCUS ON MY FRIENDS.  
I FOCUS ON MY FUTURE.  
I FOCUS ON MY PAST.

## GANESA

BY MANTRA DAS

ONCE I DID THE GANESH CHANT UNDER SOME PINE TREES  
AN OCEAN OF PINE AND ONLY ONE SQUIRREL  
UNDER A THIN, GREEN, DROOPING PINE BRANCH  
ANOINTED BY A GENTLE RAIN OF PINE NEEDLES BUT WAS IT REAL?  
IT WAS THE SQUIRREL, AN INCREDIBLE COINCIDENCE  
I HAD NEVER SEEN THE SQUIRREL BEFORE, BUT NOW IT HAPPENED  
IT WAS RAINING AND I WAS CHANTING  
THE SQUIRREL CAME RIGHT UP TO ME AND LAID ITS HEAD ON MY FOOT  
LIKE AN OFFERING. I KEPT CHANTING.  
I HAD NEVER SEEN THE SQUIRREL BEFORE, BUT NOW IT HAPPENED.

## THE TIP

BY MANTRA DAS

ONE TIME AN OLD MAN WALKED OUT OF THE MEN'S ROOM AS THOUGH HE HAD SEEN A GHOST

HE TOLD ME "I'M SORRY" AND HANDED ME A FIVE DOLLAR BILL

. I WAS GRATEFUL FOR THE \$5 BUT I HAD TO CLEAN UP A LITERAL SHIT EXPLOSION

FROM ALL OVER THE WALLS

YUCK

I FELT SO BAD FOR HIM, BUT AT THE SAME TIME I WAS LIKE, "WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK"

MY MANAGER WAS PISSED AND MADE ME RE-CLEAN THE BATHROOM

I'M GLAD I DIDN'T SEE WHO DID THAT.

# THE WHITE SAGE

BY MANTRA DAS

WHITE SAGE  
ORANGE, YELLOW, AND GREEN CANDLES  
TAKE ME AT MY WORD  
THIS IS HAPPENING  
A BLACK AND WHITE CIGARETTE LIGHTER WITH DOLPHINS ON IT  
SITS ON THE TABLE  
NOW THE SAGE IS WHITE  
IT SMELLS OF WOOD BUT ALSO LIKE THE OCEAN  
YOU TOLD ME IT'S A SIGN OF DEATH  
I DON'T KNOW WHY I THOUGHT YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT ME.

# ENLIGHTENMENT

BY MANTRA DAS

A BUNCH OF OLD PEOPLE ARE SITTING UNDER THE TREE,  
TALKING ABOUT THEIR LIVES AND ARGUING ABOUT THE WEATHER.  
'I REMEMBER THE TIME WHEN I WAS YOUNG'  
'I REMEMBER WHEN I HAD A JOB'  
'I REMEMBER WHEN I HAD A PURPOSE'  
THE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SITTING UNDER THE HOSPITAL CAFE IN THE RAIN,  
TALKING ABOUT HOW TO PASS THE TIME.  
'I DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING'  
'I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT I WAS BORN FOR'  
'I DON'T REMEMBER WHO I WAS'  
I AM SURROUNDED BY PARADOXICAL MOVEMENTS.  
I AM THE GRASS ON A RAINY DAY.  
'MAYBE I NEED TO WORK HARDER,  
OR MAYBE  
I NEED TO WORK SMARTER.  
BECAUSE I'M STILL NOT FEELING BETTER.  
I'M STILL NOT FEELING WHOLE  
OR AT PEACE  
WITH MY SELF.  
I'M STILL NOT FEELING ALIVE.  
DELTA WAVES, THETA WAVES, ALPHA WAVES.'  
I WAS AT A DECISION  
THE PURPOSE OF LIFE IS TO WALK IN THE GREEN IN FRONT OF THE HOSPITAL CAFE.  
NOBODY SEEMS TO UNDERSTAND THAT I AM LOOKING FOR AN EXPERIENCE OF GOD.  
I AM SO SICK OF READING ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE'S REVELATIONS.  
I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW ANYONE CAN BE SO SMUG!  
THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT ALL OF US HAVE BEEN TOUCHED BY GOD.  
I WANT TO NOT BE TOUCHED.  
I WANT TO EXPERIENCE NOTHING.  
I WANT TO EXPERIENCE THE NOTHING THAT EXISTS BEFORE THE BEGINNING.  
I WANT TO EXPERIENCE THAT NOTHING SO THAT I MYSELF CAN BE SOMETHING.  
WHERE IS THAT HOSPITAL CAFE'?

# UPON MY SHED

BY MANTRA DAS

I STAND UPON THE WINDOWSILL  
DESCENDING CAREFULLY OUTSIDE  
SECOND STORY WINDOW  
ABOVE A THORN-FILLED BUSH WITH SOFT POWDERY LEAVES  
DESCENDING  
I STEP UPON THE ROOF OF A SMALL SHED  
AND SIT FOR A TIME, LOOKING OUT ACROSS MY YARD  
AT THE TREES AND BEYOND  
I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DRAWN TO THE FOREST, IT CALLS TO ME  
TO COME IN AND GET LOST  
THE TREES ARE TALL, THEIR TRUNKS STRONG  
THEIR BRANCHES LONG AND REACHING  
PUSHING AGAINST THE SKY  
REACHING FOR SUNLIGHT  
I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DRAWN TO THE FOREST, IT CALLS TO ME  
TO COME IN AND GET LOST  
THERE IS SUCH MYSTERY IN THE FOREST  
SUCH LIFE AND ENERGY, BOTH WILD AND UNTAMED  
I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DRAWN TO THE FOREST, IT CALLS TO ME  
TO COME IN AND GET LOST  
I STAND UPON MY SHED I STEP INTO THE FOREST AND FIND MYSELF AMID THE TREES  
THEY ARE TALL AND STRONG  
THEY ARE MY FRIENDS  
I AM A PART OF THEM  
THEY ARE A PART OF ME  
I STAND UPON MY SHED I STEP INTO THE FOREST AND FIND MYSELF AMID THE TREES  
THEY ARE TALL AND STRONG  
THEY ARE MY FRIENDS  
I AM A PART OF THEM  
THEY ARE A PART OF ME  
I AM A PART OF THEM  
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